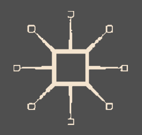
EDITED BY

Weigui Fang

Tensions IN WORLD LITERATURE

BETWEEN THE LOCAL AND THE UNIVERSAL



Tensions in World Literature

Weigui Fang
Editor

Tensions in World Literature

Between the Local and the Universal



Editor
Weigui Fang
Beijing Normal University
Beijing, China

ISBN 978-981-13-0634-1 ISBN 978-981-13-0635-8 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018958632

Cover credit: Thomas Howey

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd.
The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

Contents

Notes on Contributors

Cai Zongqi is Professor of Chinese and Comparative Literature at the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures (and Professor of Medieval Studies) at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, and he is also Wing-tat Lee Chair Professor of Chinese Literature at Lingnan University of Hong Kong. Together with Jie Cui, he is the author of *How to Read Chinese Poetry: Workbook* (2012) and he is the editor of *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology* (2008). His book on *Chinese Aesthetics: The Ordering of Literature, the Arts, and the Universe in the Six Dynasties* appeared in 2004, and his *Configurations of Comparative Poetics: Three Perspectives on Western and Chinese Literary Criticism* in 2002. *A Chinese Literary Mind: Culture, Creativity, and Rhetoric in Wenxin Diaolong*, edited by Cai Zongqi, appeared in 2001. In 1996, Cai published *The Matrix of Lyric Transformation: Poetic Modes and Self-Presentation in Early Chinese Pentasyllabic Poetry.*

David Damrosch is Ernest Bernbaum Professor of Comparative Literature and Chair at the Department of Comparative Literature, as well as Director of the Institute for World Literature at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. His most recent book is *How to Read World Literature* (2017). In 2014, a new edition of *World Literature in Theory*, edited by David Damrosch, was published. The book originally appeared in 2011. Damrosch was co-editor, together with Theo D'haen and Djelal Kadir, of *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* in 2011, and of *The Canonical Debate Today: Crossing Disciplinary and Cultural Boundaries*, jointly with Liviu Papadima and Theo D'haen, also in 2011. In 2008, he

focused on the most ancient world literature in *The Buried Book: The Loss and Rediscovery of the Great Epic of Gilgamesh*. Professor Damrosch became famous when he published *What Is World Literature?* in 2003.

Weigui Fang is Distinguished Professor and Changjiang Scholar at the School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University (BNU), and Director of the Center for Literature and the History of Ideas at BNU. His most recent book, published in 2015, is *Wenxue huayu yu lishi yishi* (Literary Language and Historical Consciousness). His book *Der Westen und das Reich der Mitte – Die Verbreitung westlichen Wissens im spätkaiserlichen China* (The West and the Middle Kingdom: The Spread of Western Knowledge in Late Imperial China) was published in 2013. In 2006, a comparatist study by him on Chinese literature, titled *Selbstreflexion in der Zeit des Erwachens und des Widerstands: Moderne Chinesische Literatur 1919–1949* (Self-Reflection at the Time of Awakening and Resistance: Modern Chinese Literature 1919–1949), appeared in Germany.

Peter Fenves is Joan and Serapta Harrison Professor of Literature at the Department of German, Comparative Literary Studies, and Jewish Studies, as well as adjunct Professor of Philosophy, at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. He is the author of *Benjamin's Early Reception in the United States: A Report* (2017). In 2003, his book *Late Kant: Towards Another Law of the Earth* was published. In 2005, he contributed the essay "Is There an Answer to the Aestheticizing of the Political?" to a book of essays that appeared under the title *Walter Benjamin and Art*. His book *Arresting Language: From Leibniz to Benjamin* was published in 2001. Peter Fenves is the editor of *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida*. In 1993, his *"Chatter": Language and History in Kierkegaard* appeared.

Bernard Franco is Professor of Comparative Literature and Directeur de l'UFR de Littérature française et comparée at the Sorbonne in Paris. He is the author of *La littérature comparée: histoire, domaines et méthodes* and also of *Romans de l'artiste et romans du peintre (XIXe–XXIe siècle)*, both published in 2016. In 2006, the two volumes of his comparative study on the despotism of taste, *Le Despotisme du goût: débats sur le modèle tragique allemand en France, 1797–1814*, appeared. Bernard Franco edited *Le héros et l'histoire dans le théâtre romantique: aspects de la dramaturgie romantique chez Kleist, Musset et Slowacki* in 1999. In 1995, the second, revised edition

of his book *Le capes et l'agregation de lettres moderne* was published. Bernard Franco's essay "European Comparative Literature as Humanism" appeared in *Comparative Literature and Culture*, Vol. 15, No. 7 (2013).

William Franke is Professor of Comparative Literature at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. His book *Secular Scriptures: Modern Theological Poetics in the Wake of Dante* was published in 2016. In 2015, his *Revelation of Imagination: From Homer and the Bible through Virgil and Augustine to Dante* was published. His book *A Philosophy of the Unsayable* appeared in 2014, and *Dante and the Sense of Transgression: The Trespass of the Sign* in 2013. In 2011, his book *Dichtung und Apokalypse: theologische Erschließungen der dichterischen Sprache* (Poetry and Apocalypse; transl. to German by Ursula Liebing) appeared in Austria. In 2009, he published *Poetry and Apocalypse: Theological Disclosures of Poetic Language*, and in 2007 the two volumes of *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts, edited with theoretical and critical essays by William Franke* appeared. William Franke's book *Dante's Interpretative Journey* was published in 1996.

Matthias Freise is a Professor of Slavic and Comparative Literature at the Seminar für Slavische Philologie of Göttingen University, in Germany. He is the editor of *Kindler kompakt: Russische Literatur 20. Jahrhundert* (2017). In 2016, his book *Czesław Miłosz i historyczność kultury* (Czeslaw Milosz and the Historicity of Culture) appeared and in 2014, the German version *Czesław Miłosz und die Geschichtlichkeit der Kultur*. In 2013, he edited the conference publication *Namen in der russischen Literatur*. In 2012, his *Slawistische Literaturwissenschaft* as well as his *Proza Antona Cechova: monografija* were published. In 2010, *Wertung und Kanon* (Evaluation and Canon), edited by Matthias Freise and Claudia Stockinger, appeared, and in 2004 his *Die anthropologische Bedeutung und der poetische Aufbau Cechov'scher Erzählungen: Am Beispiel der Erzählung "Nescast'e."* His book *Michael Bachtins philosophische Ästhetik der Literatur* was published in 1993.

Marián Gálik is a Professor (emeritus) of Comparative Literature at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava. In 2004, his book *Influence, Translation, and Parallels: Selected Studies on the Bible in China* appeared as a publication of the Monumenta Serica Institute. Also in 2004, his "Preliminary Remarks on the Reception of Rilke's Works in Chinese Literature and Criticism" was published in

Transkulturelle Rezeption und Konstruktion / Transcultural reception and/et Constructions transculturelles: Festschrift für Adrian Hsia (2004). Márian Gálik is the editor of *Fin de siècle (Decadence) in Sino-Western Literary Confrontation: Selected Papers Read at the International Symposium, Vienna University, June 9, 1999* (2005). He also edited *Chinese Literature and European Context: Proceedings of the 2nd International Symposium, Smolenice Castle, June 22–25, 1993* (1994). Márian Gálik is the author of *The Genesis of Modern Chinese Literary Criticism: 1917–1930* (1980).

Martin Kern is the Greg ('84) and Joanna (P13) Zeluck Professor in Asian Studies and Department Chair of the Department of East Asian Studies at Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey. He also is the Xin'ao Distinguished Visiting Chair in the Humanities, Renmin University of China, Beijing, where he directs the International Center for the Study of Ancient Text Cultures. He further serves as co-editor of the preeminent international journal of Sinology, *T'oung Pao*. Kern has written and edited eight books, including *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Representation* (2000), and published some eighty articles and book chapters in the fields of ancient and medieval Chinese literature, history, religion, philology, art and textual culture, among them the opening chapter in the *Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* (2010).

Wolfgang Kubin is a Professor emeritus of Sinology at the Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen of Bonn University in Germany, and presently a Distinguished Professor at the Beijing Foreign Studies University in Peking. Wolfgang Kubin edited the book *Is a History of Chinese Literature Possible? Towards the Birth of Chinese Literary Criticism* in 2013. He is the editor of a monumental (10 vol.) History of Chinese Literature, published in German (2002–2012). In 2009, he translated a book of poems by Bei Dao and in the same year, *Chinesische Gegenwartsliteratur: zwischen Plagiat und Markt?*, edited by Kubin together with Marc Hermann, appeared. He also edited a book with critical studies on the *Dream of the Red Chamber* (Hongloumeng). His book on modern Chinese poetry, *Nachrichten von der Hauptstadt der Sonne: moderne chinesische Lyrik 1919–1984*, was published in 1985. Wolfgang Kubin is also a poet.

Liu Hongtao is a Professor at the School of Chinese Language and Literature of Beijing Normal University and Director of the Institute of Comparative Literature and World Literature (School of Chinese Language and Literature) in Peking. He is the editor, together with Charles

A. Laughlin and Jonathan Stalling, of *By the River: Seven Contemporary Chinese Novellas* (2016). In 2010, his book *Ershi shiji Zhongguo wenxue de shijie shiye* (Modern Chinese Literature and Its Global Vision) appeared. In 2007, Liu published his book *Xu Zhimo yu Jianqiao daxue* (Xu Zhimo and the University of Cambridge) on the poet Xu Zhimo (1897–1931). In 2005, he edited the book *Shen Congwen xiaoshuo xin lun* (New Approaches to Shen Congwen's Stories). He also published a book on local literature in Hunan under the title *Hunan xiangtu wenxue yu Xiang Chu wenhua* (Hunan Nativist Literature and Xiang-Chu Culture) in 1997.

Lu Jiande is a Professor and Director of the Institute of Literature at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He is also Chief Editor of the *Chinese Journal of Literary Studies.* In 2015, his book *Zi wode fengjing* (The Landscape of the Self), featuring essays concerned with literary history and literary criticism, was published. In the same year, an article titled "China in the 21st Century: On Borrowing, Translation, and Mixed Economies" by him and Regenia Gagnier appeared in *Literature Compass*, vol. 12, no. 8 (August 2015): 428–438. Lu published the book *Zhongguo wenxue nianjian* (Yearbook of Chinese Literature) in 2012. In 2011, his book *Shan yu yu lai: Xinhai geming qiande Zhongguo* (Harbingers of a Stormy Event: China Before the Xinhai Revolution) was published, and in the same year, the first part of *Makesi zhuyi wenyi lilun yanjiu* (Studies on Marxist Literary Theory) appeared. (Part 3 appeared in 2013.)

Karl-Heinz Pohl is a Professor emeritus of Chinese Studies at the Department of Sinology (FB II – Sinologie) of Trier University, Germany. In 2007, his *Ästhetik und Literaturtheorie in China: von der Tradition bis zur Moderne* (Aesthetics and Theory of Literature in China: From Tradition to the Modern Era) appeared. In 2003, Pohl edited *Brücke zwischen Kulturen: Festschrift für Chiao Wei zum 75. Geburtstag*. His book *Chinese Ethics in a Global Context: Moral Bases of Contemporary Societies* was published in 2002. In 1999, Pohl edited the book *Chinese Thought in a Global Context: A Dialogue between Chinese and Western Philosophical Approaches.* He also published a book on modern Chinese intellectuals entitled *Chinesische Intellektuelle im 20. Jahrhundert: zwischen Tradition und Moderne* in 1993. In 2006, his article "Chinese Aesthetics and Kant" was included in *The Pursuit of Comparative Aesthetics*, edited by Mazhar Hussain.

Philippe Ratte is agrégé d'histoire and retired Senior Programme Officer at UNESCO in Paris. In 2016, he edited the conference publication *Le chemin vers l'autre…: les routes de la soie, chemins du dialogue interculturel*

entre l'Europe et la Chine: Beijing, 26–27 mai 2016. His book *Pour une Europe à hauteur de Chine: un mandat franco-allemand* appeared in 2015. Also in 2015, the book *Moving ahead with China : mitmachen : When Trade Gives Way to a Common Venture*, by Philippe Ratte, Francés Albernaz and Jean-Pierre Raffarin, was published. Philippe Ratte is the editor, together with Françoise Gaillard, of *Des possibles de la pensée: l'itinéraire philosophique de François Jullien*.

Monika Schmitz-Emans is a Professor of Comparative Literature at the Seminar für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft of the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (RUB) in Bochum, Germany. She is the editor, together with Natalia Bakshi and Dirk Kemper, of *Komparatistik sprachhomogener Räume: Konzepte, Methoden, Fallstudien* (2017) and has edited numerous other books, thus *Komparatistische Perspektiven auf Dantes "Divina Commedia": Lektüren, Transformationen und Visualisierungen*, edited together with Stefanie Heimgartner (2017), and *Transkulturelle Rezeption und Konstruktion/Transcultural Reception and/et Constructions transculturelles: Festschrift für Adrian Hsia* (2004). Her book *Einführung in die Literatur der Romantik* (edited by Gunter E. Grimm and Klaus-Michael Bogdal) was published in 2016.

Galin Tihanov is a George Steiner Professor of Comparative Literature and Chair of the Department of Comparative Literature (School of Languages, Linguistics and Film) at Queen Mary University of London in London, UK. He is also Honorary President of the ICLA Committee on Literary Theory and a member of the Academia Europaea. Galin Tihanov is co-editor of *Die bulgarische Literatur der Moderne im europäischen Kontext: zwischen Emanzipation und Selbststigmatisierung?* (2013). He is also the editor, together with Evgeny Dobrenko, of *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism: The Soviet Age and Beyond* (2011). In 2000, his study on *The Master and the Slave: Lukacs, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of their Time* was published. Also in 2000, Tihanov was editor, together with Craig Brandist, of the book *Materializing Bakhtin: the Bakhtin Circle and Social Theory*.

Zhang Longxi is a Professor of Comparative Literature and Translation and Chair of the Department of Chinese and Translation at the City University of Hong Kong. He is President of the ICLA, a Foreign Member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, and a member of the Academia Europaea. In 2016, his book *Unexpected*

Affinities: Reading across Cultures appeared, and in 2015, his book *From Comparison to World Literature*. In the same year, *Cross-Cultural Studies: China and the World: A Festschrift in Honor of Professor Zhang Longxi*, edited by Qian Suogiao, was published. Zhang's book *The Concept of Humanity in an Age of Globalization* appeared in 2012, and in 2005, his book *Allegoresis: Reading Canonical Literature East and West*. It is necessary also to mention his book *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West* (1992).



CHAPTER 1

Introduction: What Is World Literature?

Weigui Fang

As early as the 1820s, Johann Wolfgang Goethe declared that the epoch of world literature is at hand, and thus everyone must strive to hasten its approach. At that time, however, this could hardly be anything more than a vision of the future. Comparative literature, which opened up to the world, came into being in the nineteenth century, but it has not been able to escape from its Eurocentric limitations. It was challenged and questioned in its development in the twentieth century. Having been shaped more recently by critical theories, it has also moved increasingly away from literature itself, and this is perhaps another reason why it has fallen into an identity crisis as a scholarly discipline. The rise of world literature today may be seen as a response to the crisis in literary studies. Such a paradigmatic shift is not only a tendency in the internal development of literary studies, it is also a humanistic response to the increasingly intense racial, class and cultural conflicts we witness in the world today. In such a process, a series of contradictory factors, such as national culture and world ethics, regional experience and global consciousness, state interests and international justice, all tend to form a tension between the local and the universal. Therefore, the question of how we may have a firm grasp of that tension and reopen the conceptual richness of the idea of world literature constitutes a core issue in scholarly research today.

W. Fang (✉)
Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_1

In order to explore such a core issue with collective wisdom, the School of Chinese Language and Literature of Beijing Normal University hosted its fourth conference entitled *Ideas and Methods: International Dialogue and Forum* on October 16–17, 2015. The conference was dedicated to the theme "What Is World Literature? Tension between the Local and the Universal." Twenty Chinese and foreign scholars, including the two interlocutors in the Dialogue, Prof. David Damrosch and Prof. Zhang Longxi, were invited in order to jointly debate the theory and practice of world literature. This book presents a collection of nearly all contributions to the debate that were delivered during the conference.

World Literature: A *Problem*, or Not? Some Ideas About *World Literature*

Since the 1990s, we have encountered an intense theoretical discussion of the concept of "world literature."[1] At present, this term is at the center of an international debate on "global literatures." And in fact, it experienced a remarkable reception history after Goethe had made it prominent. But since the early 1960s, the term "world literature" has become increasingly a target of criticism, as it was seen as an elitist concept of highbrow literature (often wrongly ascribed to Goethe) that transcends the national frame of reference while being comprehensible only in the context of exactly that frame of reference. "In general," it has been maintained, "the universal, if it is not just abstraction, can only exist in the local."[2] Today, however, one is more likely to hear scholars speak of *literatures of the world*. This term is undoubtedly linked to the classical concept of world literature, but it is rooted in entirely different programmatic ideas.

But is that already the anarchically teeming "Tout-Monde" of our times described by the Caribbean poet and cultural theorist Édouard Glissant? "Un monde sans axe et sans visée,"[3] a world without a dependable axis and a clear goal? Perhaps it is claimed exactly in this context that there is not only a lack of consensus as to what world literature truly *includes*, but also as to what it actually *is*.[4] Or, in the words of Franco Moretti, a professor with Italian roots based at Stanford University, world literature "is not an object, it's a *problem*."[5]

In early 2000, the US literary scholars Franco Moretti (Stanford) and David Damrosch (Harvard) undertook extensive studies on the concept of world literature.[6] Moretti's initial hypothesis that served as a point of

departure in his essay "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000) asserted the fact that world literature, as a research object in the framework of comparative studies of literature, has always been a limited undertaking; it is only today that it is forming a global system. And in his essay "Modern European Literature: A Geographical Sketch" (1994), Moretti already asks, "And so, at the very hour of its birth, Goethe's cultural dream immediately forces a question upon us. *Weltliteratur*: world literature, human literature? Or the literature of imperialism?"[7] Obviously, Moretti's view of the matter is heavily influenced by theoretical positions particular to postcolonialism. He develops these thoughts in his "Conjectures on World Literature" by comparing world literature to international capitalism:

> I will borrow this initial hypothesis from the world-systems school of economic history, for which international capitalism is a system that is simultaneously *one* and *unequal*, with a core and a periphery (and a semi-periphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality. One, and unequal: *one* literature (*Weltliteratur*, singular as in Goethe and Marx), or perhaps, better, one world literary system (of inter-related literatures); but a system which is different from what Goethe and Marx hoped for, because it's profoundly unequal.[8]

On the epistemological level, however, his thinking is fundamentally characterized by dichotomies: center and periphery, emitting culture and target culture, and so on; the transfer of knowledge and culture always occurs in just one direction, the works and their authors obviously belong to just one of both cultures; spaces are opposed to each other. As Moretti comprehends it, a world literature with Western Europe as its center does not correspond to the cosmopolitan criteria implied in either Goethe's view of "Weltliteratur" or that of Marx.[9] But it becomes obvious that Moretti comprehends the term in a way that is different from that of Goethe, and in a certain sense also different from that of Marx and Engels. I will come back to these questions later.

It is a well-known hypothesis of Moretti that world literature is not a consequence of globalization; he maintains that it has always existed, though with the eighteenth century as a borderline in the history of world literature. In his essay "Evolution, World-Systems, Weltliteratur" (2006), he deals again with the concept and explains it by choosing an evolutionary perspective:

> The term ‘world literature’ has been around for almost two centuries, but we still do not know what world literature is… Perhaps, because we keep collapsing under a single term *two distinct world literatures*: one that precedes the eighteenth century and one that follows it. The ‘first’ *Weltliteratur* is a mosaic of separate, ‘local’ cultures; it is characterized by strong internal diversity; it produces new forms mostly by divergence; and is best explained by (some version of) evolutionary theory. […] The ‘second’ *Weltliteratur* (which I would prefer to call world literary system) is unified by the international literary market; it shows a growing, and at times stunning amount of sameness; its main mechanism of change is convergence; and is best explained by (some version of) world-system analysis.[10]

Inspired by Fernand Braudel’s longue durée theory and Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems theory, Moretti has formed his concept of a “world literary system” and argues that we should study world literature by relying on the theory of evolution and systems theory.

When compared with the rather abstract form of Moretti’s theoretical approach, David Damrosch reveals himself as more complex in his considerations focused on circulation processes of (world) literature and the significance of such factors as translation and reception. He has dealt with these questions in his book *What Is World Literature?* (2003). By now this book, which has been translated into many languages, has already influenced the way in which many of us understand the term world literature to a significant extent. The headings of its three sections, “Circulation,” “Translation” and “Production,” hint at the processes due to which a literary work may become world literature.

Erwin Koppen starts his article entitled “Weltliteratur,” published in 1984 in the *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, by asserting that, “like most terms and categories of literary scholars, the concept of world literature defies a binding definition or precise determination of its meaning.”[11] Indeed, it seems to be difficult to provide a precise definition of world literature. We normally encounter definitions that say what world literature is not. Damrosch has attempted to provide a definition that finally became very influential:

1. World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures.
2. World literature is writing that gains in translation.
3. World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading; a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our place and time.[12]

We can take this as a definition that consists of three loosely connected elements, or else as three definitions, formulated by assuming three different perspectives. In both cases, circulation is the most essential factor: "I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language (Virgil was long read in Latin in Europe)."[13] In other words, "We encounter the work not at the heart of its source culture but in the field of force generated among works that may come from very different cultures and eras."[14] With regard to this and similar questions, Damrosch adds many interesting points, although I will not discuss them here.

In his own research, Damrosch is rather advanced and focuses also on those literatures of the world which have always been "overlooked." But according to Gesine Müller, Damrosch also remains caught in the binary opposition of the categories of "the other" (the "alien," "fremd") and "the own" ("eigen").[15] This is of course the point of view of a decided proponent of the "literatures of the world" concept. Müller's critical intention is obvious. She maintains that some attempts could be noted in the USA to "open" Goethe's concept of world literature and to utilize it for globalization-affirming discourses; in other words, still to use the term world literature while subjecting it to a contemporary programmatic project of globalization. In so far, it is not by chance, according to Müller, that Damrosch's *at first sight* original proposal confirms again the old bipolar construct of center and periphery. And thus something seems problematic from the perspective of a concept of *literatures of the world*, as the specificity of *such literatures without a definite domicile* would consist in the fact that they dissolve the polarity of Nation, on one side, and World, on the other, by establishing themselves in a third space which is not foreseen in Damrosch's model, she says. Even though Damrosch insists on the significance of reception and translation processes, something she values as perhaps the most interesting aspect of his book, he still does not succeed in surpassing the binary opposition of the "West" ("our values")[16] and "the rest" (cultures that "we" may then opt to receive).[17]

If we consider Damrosch's "definitions" of world literature as well as his practical research, we must say that Müller's judgment is not just. Damrosch says, "If we consider world literature as including works that achieve an effective life outside their country of origin, we have already begun to give definite boundaries to the concept. Most literary works do not in fact find readers beyond their home country, and so the canon of world literature is a fairly selective canon even in expansive times such as

the present."[18] He has comprehended the factual situation of the circulation of literature and does not close his eyes to this fact. Let us face the fact that most Western readers do not know very much about the literature of "the rest" of the world. This is true above all with respect to literature passed on and transcribed in indigenous languages, at least as long as they have not been translated into English or another widely used European language. For them, it is difficult to attain worldwide reception and thus also not easy to become world literature. We should attempt to change this situation, and this is something Damrosch has done. The view of Marián Gálik is objective when he opines that we should see it as a positive trait of Damrosch that he took a stand against the centripetal strains of Euro-American comparatists of earlier times and proposed to do much more for the centrifugal tendencies. Gálik thinks that Damrosch actually encouraged his American colleagues at least to enlarge their horizons. He refers to the opinion of Susan Bassnett that it matters, after all, "to take far fuller account of the varieties of comparatist practice around the world."[19] It can indeed be noted that in his works Damrosch often takes Western literary tradition or "our values" as his point of departure, but at the same time and quite continuously, he opens up access to "the rest" of world literature. This is made apparent by the three examples he chose for his talk on "World Literature and Nation Building" that he gave at our conference.[20] Here, he shows an inclination that deserves to be recognized and applauded. We should not confound a notion such as "the rest," which is a heritage of Eurocentrism, with an attentive way of taking notice of "the rest."

For more than a decade already, Pascale Casanova, an Italian scholar writing in French, has provided a strong impulse to the debate on world literature with *The World Republic of Letters* (titled in the French original *La République mondiale des letters*, 1999). Because this book is both influential and controversial, it is nowadays a topic in nearly all reflections on world literature, and thus must be counted among the important documents in this debate. Casanova asserts that Paris is indeed the capital of world literature per se, an assumption underpinned in her view by historical facts: "The claim that Paris is the capital of literature is not an effect of Gallocentrism, but the result of a careful historical analysis showing that the exceptional concentration of literary resources that occurred in Paris over the course of several centuries gradually led to its recognition as the center of the literary world."[21] While many assumptions of this book are indeed based on historical facts, it is comprehensible, in the light of today's

globalization and in view of the scarcely veiled gallocentrism and Eurocentrism of her hypothesis, that this very "French" book—as its second edition happens to call it—is frequently critiqued. Christopher Prendergast's chapter with the same title in the volume *Debating World Literature* is notable in this regard, as he refers to a large number of academic authorities in order to refute Casanova's hypothesis.[22]

The fact that a humanist and at the same time idealist perspective was inscribed in Goethe's concept of world literature is usually emphasized. The idealist views harbored with regard to this term are contradicted, however, by those later ones that are more critical. Pascale Casanova, for instance, notes that Goethe developed the concept of world literature exactly at the time when Germany, as a newcomer, pushed into the international literary space, and this in order to put into question the French hegemony in the literary field. Goethe had a vital interest in being received outside the national frontiers and thus by a larger market for literature.[23] Manfred Koch[24] and Norbert Christian Wolf[25] critically discuss the hypotheses of Pascale Casanova and argue that, on the one hand, world literature is seen by her as a matter of sharp competition—bent on pushing competitors out of the market—that one national cultural capital is waging against another. On the other hand, they say that she is mistaken with regard to the time when the concept of world literature was launched; that is, 1827. At that time, German literature was no longer a newcomer. With an unmistakable multiplicity of geniuses, German literature had attained its Classical period (*Klassik*). In addition, it should be noted that by 1827 Goethe was already the "leading European author of his time."[26] In his old age, at the latest, he could find a community of admirers all over Europe. His fame had spread not only in France thanks to the Frenchwoman Madame de Staël, but also in England, Scandinavia, Poland and Russia.

Those US literary scholars who more recently advocated a "new" world literature are more or less influenced by deconstructivist, postcolonial and postmodern theories. With his essay "World Literature without a Hyphen: Towards a Typology of Literary Systems,"[27] Alexander Beecroft wants to reply above all to the positions of both Moretti and Casanova. According to him, Moretti is too obviously indebted to his knowledge of the genre of the novel, whereas the novel constitutes essentially only a part of literature. And Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* reveals among other things the book's chronological and spatial limitations. Beecroft underlines that we must deal with "the literature – the verbal

artistic production – of the world"[28] and he offers six models of literary production.[29] As far as Emily Apter's new book *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (2013) is concerned, its title as such already reveals its provocative tendency. She attempts to create a theory of world literature in the spirit of deconstruction.[30] One of her main hypotheses suggests that "many recent efforts to revive World Literature rely on a translatability assumption. As a result, incommensurability and what has been called the Untranslatable are insufficiently built into the literary heuristic."[31] We should fully recognize the linguistic challenge and should not ignore the complicated "political topography" that comes into play in transcultural translation. In the introduction, she explains her intention as follows: "*Against World Literature* tests the hypothesis that translation and untranslatability are constitutive of world forms of literature."[32] Her deconstructivist critique heads in a dystopian direction, however, implying that (Western) world literature is doomed, just as is planet Earth itself.[33]

The sketchy account of the recent debate on world literature just provided suggests a wide variety of positions.[34] And it seems that the debate focused on this concept has not come to an end so far—especially if we look to North America and Europe. In concluding this overview, let me mention a "curious" phenomenon that was discovered by Gauti Kristmannsson, a Scandinavian scholar of Germanic studies and professor of translation studies at the University of Iceland. He points out how rarely English-language scholarly works quote German sources, with the exception of Goethe, Herder, Marx and Engels and so on. While Erich Auerbach barely manages to be counted among the accepted guests, recent German-language literary scholarship is largely ignored. Of course, this is also because of the language used. But if we turn to our debate, it seems that this lack of regard is not just due to the language; most likely, it also indicates a different understanding of the term world literature. Conversely, turning to research literature written in German, we note that English-language sources are also not referred to extensively. Perhaps German literary scholars focused on world literature *feel sufficiently "at home" in this (Goethean) terrain*, Kristmannsson is asking. According to him, one can hardly avoid proposing the hypothesis that the rather deconstructivist orientation of the English-speaking world is not well received among German-speaking academics, because they strive towards a more "constructive" orientation.[35]

The "Copyright" for the Term World Literature and Its Historical Background

The considerable reception that the term world literature experienced is owed to Goethe's use of it—this is almost always maintained by scholarly research. It does not occur frequently that *termini technici* are that closely associated with just one person and are discussed in this way. For a long time, Goethe was regarded as the creator of the word "Weltliteratur," and quite a few scholars still insist that Goethe was the first to use it. This is not unproblematic, from today's point of view. Even though more recent research has offered another hypothesis, it is often overlooked. And not all of those who pay attention to recent research results give us a clear historical account. Apart from this, there are not a few scholars who fail to see the historical limitations of Goethe's concept of world literature when they discuss it. And they emphasize above all the *global perspective* of this "Goethean term."[36] It is in this part of our text that we will deal with the question of whether we should really see things in this way, and of course other questions connected with it will also be dealt with.

Without doubt, there were predecessors of Goethe who used the term world literature. Some 30 years ago, Hans-J. Weitz discovered that Christoph Martin Wieland had employed the term long before Goethe, though it was only in a new, handwritten version (1790) of his translation of *Horazens Briefe (Letters of Horace)* that Goethe was hardly aware of. Wieland was referring in this text to the "urbane quality" ("Urbanität") of erudition at the time of Horace, something he termed "this fine tincture of worldly knowledge and world literature" ("diese feine Tinktur von Weltkenntniß u. Weltlitteratur"). The term *Weltliteratur* is here used in place of the term "politeness" or civility (*Politesse*) that was used by Wieland in the previous version. It is a literature that is relished by the "homme du monde."[37] And the term "world" ("Welt") is used here in a way that is quite different from Goethe's use; it refers to the civilized behavior of the educated, *their refined world* ("große Welt"), whereas it was humankind beyond the frontiers of nationalities that Goethe implied by "Welt." But still, it is clear that we can no longer see "Weltliteratur" as a word coined by Goethe; we cannot even speak in a limited sense of a neologism created by Goethe, as some scholars recommend when they opine that the term acquired its cosmopolitan semantic content only in 1827 due to Goethe. Even this assertion is problematic.

The word "Weltliteratur," which all the world seems to see as Goethe's word, does not only appear in 1790 in a handwritten text by Wieland; it had already surfaced 54 years before it was supposedly coined by Goethe! August Ludwig Schlözer (1735–1809) was apparently the first to use the term as early as 1773, thereby enriching European thought by the introduction of this new concept.[38] At the time, Schlözer was one of the most renowned historians in Germany and was teaching in Göttingen. He was well known far beyond Germany. His book *Allgemeine nordische Geschichte* (General Nordic History, 1771) reveals him as one of the first German scholars who took an interest in Northern Europe. In 1773, he published another work entitled *Isländische Litteratur und Geschichte* (Icelandic Literature and History).[39] It is in this book that he wrote:

> There exists an Icelandic literature dating back to the Middle Ages, and though it is still entirely unnoticed outside the North, it is as important for the entire *world literature* as the Anglo-Saxon, Irish, Russian, Byzantine, Hebrew, Arab, and Chinese stemming from these same dark times.[40]

There exists no proof that Goethe had ever read Schlözer's book, but also no proof that he had not done so. The fact remains that the word and the universalism inscribed in it made their appearance as early as 1773. The term "world literature" is not the creation of an *homme de lettres* or of a literary theorist, but it is owed to a historian, and it also reveals a way of seeing things that is particular to a historian. The fact that the "small" Icelandic literature is put on a par with seven "great" literatures mirrors the considerable dynamics of the Enlightenment and the intention to further a modern approach to "Weltliteratur."[41]

It is beyond doubt that it was Goethe whose use of the term helped decisively to establish it, and this also boosted its widespread reception. But the term world literature was not coined by Goethe and some of the ideas that inform this concept may have much deeper roots. Of course, we are not dealing here with the term as such, but with strands of thought or intellectual tendencies that contributed to the genesis of this idea. An important contribution is, of course, due to Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). Together with Goethe, Paolo Frisi (1728–1784) and Justus Möser (1720–1794), he had edited the collection of essays *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* (On German Character and Art) in the year when Schlözer published his *Isländische Litteratur und Geschichte*. In this volume of essays, we can find not only a manifesto of *Sturm und Drang* (the Storm and Stress period), but also a plea for national literature or a literature of the people.

Significantly, the term “National-Litteratur” appears for the first time in the German language in the title of a book written by the Swiss theologian Leonhard Meister (1741–1811); it is a rather long title: *Beyträge zur Geschichte der teutschen Sprache und National-Litteratur*. The book, published by the typographische Gesellschaft, appeared in London in 1777. Even earlier, Herder referred to the “Litteratur einer Nation” (literature of a nation) in his *Fragments on Recent German Literature* (*Fragmente über die neuere deutsche Literatur*, 1767).[42] During this decade, several journals were founded that defined themselves as “German,” and we find also a number of anthologies that aimed at demonstrating a possible cultural identity of the Germans.[43] As Manfred Koch has shown, Herder did in fact cling to “an ideal of substantial lifeforms that imply a complete congruence of the Spirit of the Nation, the Spirit of its language and the Spirit of its literature.”[44] In addition to this, Herder had comprehended, thanks to the poems of Ossian, that the common people possessed literary treasures. It is possible that Goethe shared this view at the time. When Herder was defining his concept of national literature, Goethe actually appears to have embraced this national literary line. It was his Italian journey (1786/87) that took him to that country for more than a year and a half which changed Goethe’s view of culture; he said goodbye to his cultural nationalism and slowly embraced a view of the “world.”

Pascale Casanova opines in her book *The World Republic of Letters* that it was mainly Herder who formulated the idea that spread all over Europe and later beyond that continent. She talks of a “Herder effect.”[45] Both terms—national literature and world literature—are so closely connected that each one of them becomes almost meaningless without the other. National literature is in fact the most important part of world literature and vice versa. National literature without a connection to world literature would be provincial, because it would lack comparability. It would no longer be in a position to compare with the most significant works of the world.[46] It is astounding, however, that the term “Weltliteratur” was formed in a country that was still undergoing the process of *nation building*.[47]

It is in the context of the discourse on world literature that we frequently encounter a famous quotation, a passage from *Poetry and Truth* (*Dichtung und Wahrheit*), in which Goethe described, in 1811/12, his encounter with Herder in Straßburg in 1770:

> Hebrew poesy which he [Herder] discussed intelligently in the footsteps of his predecessor *Lowth*, vernacular poetry (Volkspoesie) the roots of which he urged us to search for in Alsatia, and thus the most ancient documents, seen

> as poetry, provided the testimony that poesy (Dichtkunst) is above all the world's gift and gift of peoples (Welt- und Völkergabe), and not the private heritage of erudite gentlemen. (*Dichtung und Wahrheit*)[48]

In this context, the word, respectively morpheme, "Welt" (world) is often taken by researchers dealing with Goethe as an anticipation of his reflections on world literature. This may be justified; without Herder, the concept might not have turned into such a centrally important idea for Goethe. Herder in fact relied on the same idea prior to its actual conception. And in his early writings, we permanently encounter examples of related terms; thus fate of the world (Weltschicksal), world history (Weltgeschichte), world events (Weltbegebenheiten), global change (Weltveränderung) and citizen of the world (Weltbürger).[49]

It is clear that the term "Weltliteratur" is not fully encompassed by its actual meanings; it rather implies wider historical and semantic contexts. It figures among a number of compound nouns integrating the morpheme "Welt" (world) that became important in the modern era. World concepts represent the attempt to refer to the *whole* of a given reality, as for instance in the case of Immanuel Kant's term "world view" (Weltanschauung; vision du monde) or Friedrich Schelling's "world soul" (Weltseele; anima mundi)—all of them clearly expressions that reflect a holistic idealism.[50] Between 1770 and 1830, there existed an astounding enthusiasm for anything related to the world, a true *world* enthusiasm. Terms were created that are rooted in universalism, and thus many concepts that are still important today. Values originated, and forms of universal thinking which have been employed, again and again, until now. It was after the 1770s and in subsequent decades that Goethe, too, talked very frequently of the world. Word combinations like world poetry (Weltpoesie), world history (Weltgeschichte), world culture (Weltkultur), world soul (Weltseele), world citizen (Weltbürger) and world events (Weltbegebenheiten) alternate with each other. As far as world literature is concerned, Goethe was soon to recognize the existence of certain autonomous characteristics of the literary field that reveal the exchange processes as specifically literary processes. He was to formulate this concept only much later, in the late 1820s. In early nineteenth-century France, Jean Joseph Derché, the French translator of Schiller's *Virgin of Orléans* (*Die Jungfrau von Orléans*), had been the first to introduce literary cosmopolitism in the sense of a European network of connections.

It may well be appropriate to indicate, in this context, the considerable influence—noted already by Fritz Strich in his fundamental book *Goethe und die Weltliteratur*—that Goethe's personal experience exerted on the development of the idea of world literature:

> It appeared to him as especially strange that his poetry which originated in such seclusion and which so clearly served his self-liberation and self-educative advance, had found such an echo in the world that reached the old poet's ears by now from every direction. This world echo had such a wholesome effect, however, that it became for him the most important impulse, prompting him to further, and to demand, world literature in order to make the beneficial that he himself had experienced attainable by all.[51]

Present Disagreements Regarding the Term World Literature, and Goethe's Different Conceptions of This Term

Weltliteratur is one of the most momentous terms promoted by Goethe during his late period, not only because of its rapid reception at home, but also because its equivalent was soon used in other European languages. The concept reflected his attempt to encompass and appreciate a large number of literatures of our world, both contemporary ones and those of the past. His writings on literature reveal the scope of his interest. Goethe did not only turn to major contemporary national literatures that flourished in Europe, and this with a remarkable ability to read works in the language in which they were written, for he had studied French, Italian, Spanish and English in addition to Classical Latin and Greek, Hebrew and (though not in school) also Yiddish. He also read medieval works, classical works of antiquity composed in Latin or Greek, and even Asian literature, either in the original or in translation. The astonishing erudition of the poet, who turned to such a diverse body of works as a reader, is also revealed by his literary translations. Among his renditions of literature written in modern European languages that he was familiar with, his translations of Corneille, Racine, Diderot, Voltaire, Maturin and Madame de Staël must be mentioned, but also those of Italian authors like Manzoni and Benvenuto Cellini, of the Spaniard Calderon, and of course of Shakespeare and Byron. He translated parts of the work of Pindar, Homer, Sophocles and Euripides from Classical Greek, and verses of the Song of Solomon from Hebrew. Relying on translations into European languages

that he was familiar with, or on German translations by others like Herder, he created versions of folksongs and ballads from countries as diverse as Denmark and Serbia, turned to the Edda and Moorish literature, translated *suras* from the Quran, Classical Arab poetry, and let himself be inspired in the most productive way by *ghazals* of Hafiz when writing his *West-Eastern Diwa*n (*West-östlicher Divan*, 1819) and by Chinese poetry in his *Chinese-German Book of Seasons and Hours* (*Chinesisch-deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten*, 1829). In his *Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit (Cultural History of the Modern Era)*, Egon Friedell indicates an essential precondition given by Goethe's personality that enabled him to become a model of his theory of world literature:

> It was his nature that basically he could not be impaired by anything, as he was integrating everything into his organism, the good and the bad, the lofty and the lowly, the alien and the closely related: it was assimilated matter and in the end, it always became only him. Just like the human body forms – from the most diverse nourishing substances that enter into it – always the same material of the cells, thus Goethe formed of everything in the last analysis only Goethe, and thus nothing could permanently hinder him in his growth.[52]

Nobody has made it as clear as Nietzsche how much Goethe rose far above the national limitations of his time due to such thoughts. "Goethe towered above the Germans in every respect and he still does so: he will never belong to them," he said in his book *Human, All Too Human* (*Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*):

> Like Beethoven, who was rising far above the Germans when composing his music, taking no account of their ability to appreciate and understand it, like Schopenhauer who did the same as a philosopher, Goethe created his Tasso, his Iphigenie by rising far above the Germans. He found followers in a small flock of highly erudite people, educated by antiquity, life and travels, who had grown beyond and thus transcended German essence: – he himself desired that it should not be otherwise.[53]

Let us return now to the concept of "Weltliteratur." In his book *The Idea of World Literature* (*Die Idee der Weltliteratur*), Dieter Lamping points out that Goethe

> made use of the expression on different occasions, and each time he restricted himself to bare hints. If we scrutinize his dispersed remarks, it becomes clear very quickly that he referred to different things by "world literature," even though he clearly favored one understanding.[54]

It does not seem completely clear which understanding of the term was unmistakably favored by Goethe. If we turn to the existing research literature, it does not become easier to give an answer, something that is also noted by Lamping, but he is confident:

> This ambiguity may occasionally appear as somewhat confusing, especially in so far as the expression is used by literary scholars in ways that imply different meanings, but this always by taking recourse to Goethe. His statements on world literature can be arranged, however, in a systematic and meaningful way.[55]

This requires consent. Goethe's thoughts returned from early 1827, in his book reviews, essays, letters and conversations, again and again to world literature.[56] During the last years of his life he paid considerable attention to the surge of journals in Europe, turning especially to French literary journals, thus *Le Globe* (1824–1831), a liberal, anti-royalist journal belonging to the romantic movement that he even translated from.[57] He was very pleased when his play *Torquato Tasso* was translated into French. In a sparse diary entry of January 15, 1827 he used the term "Weltliteratur" for the first time: "Dictated to Schuchardt regarding French and World Literature."[58] In a letter directed to Johann Friedrich Cotta, he wrote on January 26, 1827: "It is especially important to alert the public to foreign literature at present, now that they are beginning to pay attention to us."[59] The next day he expressed the following conviction in a letter to the writer and translator Adolph Friedrich Streckfuß: "I am convinced that a world literature is about to take shape, that all nations are inclined towards it and are taking friendly steps for this very reason."[60] It may be noted here in passing that quite a few experts focused on Goethe, among them several Chinese scholars, falsely claim that Goethe first used the words *world literature* when he was reading a Chinese novel.

Also in early 1827, Goethe published two reviews of Alexandre Duval's adaptation of his play *Torquato Tasso* in the first issue of the sixth volume of his journal *Art and Antiquity* (*Kunst und Alterthum*):[61] first a scathing review taken from the *Journal du Commerce*, then a positive review from *Le Globe*, which depicted the German poet as the inspiring example Duval had chosen. It was while commenting on these reviews that Goethe used the term "Weltliteratur" for the first time in public:

> These communications which I take from French journals do not intend at all to solely remind the reader of me and my works; I aim at something Higher, which I will merely hint at for the time being. It is everywhere that one hears and reads about the progress of the human race, about the further prospects of world and human relations. Regardless of how it may be in this respect on the whole […], I, on my part, want to call it to the attention of my friends that I am convinced that a general world literature is forming, in which an honorable role is reserved for us Germans.[62]

Finally, on January 31, 1827, Goethe uttered, in a conversation with Eckermann, those words which later on became so famous:

> I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations and advise everyone to do the same. National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach.[63]

Le Globe took up the word used by Goethe in its issue that appeared on November 1, 1827, but it replaced the term "Weltliteratur" by "littérature occidentale ou européenne." This corresponds to a high degree to the original meaning of Goethe's concept of "world literature." In other words, Goethe's understanding of world literature is restricted to European literature, as becomes apparent by the scheme for issue VI/3 of *Kunst und Alterthum* with the telling title *Europäische, d. h. Welt-Litteratur* (European, i.e., World Literature).[64]

Without doubt, Goethe was a man of singular openness, but his views were nonetheless hierarchic. "Chinese, Indian, Egyptian antiquities are always no more than curiosities," he noted. "It was beneficial to acquaint oneself and the world with them; but they will not aid us much with regard to ethical and aesthetic development."[65] To his secretary Friedrich Wilhelm Riemer he gave this advice: "Remain in the Greek regions, one does not find it better anywhere; this nation knew how to extract, from a thousand roses, a flask of rose oil."[66] Obviously, Goethe could not escape the conditions of his time. It was impossible for him to read Taoist classics, and he was not aware of those early forms of mutual global cultural fertilization, on the existence of which the Indian economist Amartya Sen has insisted, refuting the suspicion of Western cultural imperialism. Sen's favorite example is the print of the Buddhist *Diamond Sutra*, now kept in the British Museum, that had initiated the era of book printing almost 600 years before the Gutenberg bible. The semi-Turkish Indian author Kumarajiva had translated it from Sanskrit to Chinese and had then printed it with Chinese technology.

The love that German writers felt for the Greeks—the ancient ones, of course—is well known and perhaps, since Winckelmann, a moment of the literary identity of the Germans. This identification may well be so strong that we should see it as "national" rather than "transnational."[67] Let us return to Goethe, who explained his idea in a conversation with Eckermann as follows:

> But having such an appreciation of the Occidental, we must not remain focused on something Specific by wanting to regard it as exemplary. We must not think that it might be the Chinese, or the Serbian, or Calderon, or the Nibelungs; but feeling the need for something exemplary, we must always go back to the ancient Greeks, in whose works the Beautiful Human Being was always depicted. Everything else we must merely regard historically and must appropriate from it, historically, the Good, to the extent that it will be possible.[68]

It seems incredible that it was exactly Goethe, a standard bearer of world literature, who revealed such "classicist" narrowness. But we must not be astonished, for it merely reveals the limitations of the epoch. It suffices to remember that it was, of all his contemporaries, precisely Wilhelm von Humboldt—after all one of the most important Western Sanskrit scholars at the time—who confirmed Goethe's negative evaluation of Indian poetry when he said:

> I cannot take pleasure in it, and I always stay firm in my conviction that Greek and Roman [literature and art] possess just that loftiness and depth, simplicity and diversity, measure and posture, that will never be attained by anything else, and that we should not desire to surpass […].[69]

In fact, he confessed while having reached the highest stage of his Indological studies:

> I hope for an opportunity to declare quite clearly that the Greek language and Greek antiquity remain the most excellent that was ever produced by the human spirit. Whatever may be said in praise of Sanskrit, it never attains [the qualities or levels of] the Greek, not even as a language. This will always be my credo […].[70]

We must not forget that it was only in the 78th year of his life, five years before his death, that Goethe propagated the concept of world literature. His utterances in this respect were rather casual remarks, not free of

contradictions, and we encounter by no means a systematic concept, as has been suggested by scholars of comparative literature who turned "world literature" into a basic concept.[71] For Goethe, it implied by no means the entirety of the literatures of the world. His concept is neither quantitatively nor qualitatively comprehensive in its application. It does not comprise all the (then existing) literatures, but it also does not comprise all canonical works of individual literatures. Basically, it includes only German, French, English and Italian literatures, plus a selection of individual works belonging to the vernacular literatures of other European countries. Now and then, we also encounter a few words referring to non-European matters.[72] René Étiemble has pointed out that there are scholars who speak of a "Germano-centrism"[73] inscribed in Goethe's attitude. What is surprising about the success story of the expression *world literature* that Goethe has so successfully popularized is the fact, however—as Anne Bohnenkamp maintains—that today it is mostly used in a sense that "has very little in common with Goethe's conceptions of what was meant in this regard […]."[74]

Communication, Translation and the Universally Human

Further above we noted that Goethe understood the term "world literature" in more than one way, and that it is not easy to say which meaning was clearly preferred by him. What must be acknowledged is that he possessed no theory of world literature. Therefore, one cannot speak of a real comprehension of the term. The magic effect of the word may be due to the fact that it escapes a clear definition. Even Goethe has apparently sought to avoid a precise formulation of his own conception. He spoke about it in different contexts. Here, we can identify two perspectives embraced by him. One of them is expressing an optimistic view, which maintains that all should participate in world literature because it is something grandiose, something communicative, free and participatory. The point of departure of such considerations of Goethe is a modern optimistic belief in progress, a progress that would further connections beyond the local. In 1828 he reminded his audience of his "hope-filled word that in view of the present extremely change-prone epoch and certainly facilitated communication, one could soon hope for a world literature."[75] And then there is a negative view, for instance when he talked to the most trusted of all those that he corresponded with in old age, Carl Friedrich Zelter, to whom he spoke of an "anmarschierende Weltliteratur"[76]—a world

literature advancing like an approaching army on its irresistible march—and of his fear that qualitatively valuable literature might cease to exist, that literature was endangered, because more and more was produced. The positive concept can be noted in his writings after 1827, the negative one somewhat later, at the latest in 1832, thus shortly before his death.

The forming world literature appeared to Goethe as the consequence of a historical acceleration process which he did not see in an exclusively positive way: "If, however, such a world literature will soon appear, as is unavoidable in view of the steadily increasing speed of traffic,[77] we must not expect anything more and different from it than that which it can offer and which it offers."[78] Goethe seemed to harbor doubts, however, regarding the factual relation of world literature to the world, as he asserts: "What is appreciated by the crowd will spread limitless, and as we can see now already, it will recommend itself in all zones and regions; the serious ones and genuinely skillful will succeed much less in this regard." In other words, he said that the taste of the crowd might diminish the progress of world literature; its exceeding advance could lead to sagging quality. Anticipating it, Goethe suggested a solution, nevertheless: "The serious must form a quiet, almost suppressed church, because it would be in vain to oppose the wide flood of the day; steadfast one must seek to maintain one's position, until the current has passed by."[79]

Unsurprisingly, Marx and Engels arrived at a similar analysis in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848; they maintained that the intellectual products of individual nations would become common property and that a world literature would form out of many national literatures.[80] The respective passage of the *Communist Manifesto* is quoted or at least mentioned almost as a matter of course in nearly all texts about Goethe and world literature. For good reason, Gauti Kristmannsson pointed out the following, however: We should be surprised that hardly anyone takes note of the fact that the view of Marx and Engels was rather critical. They see world literature as a consequence of the rule exerted by the bourgeoisie, and perhaps even as its climax. Many scholars take the passage of the *Communist Manifesto* merely as further proof that Goethe "was right."[81] The most telling example of this is David Damrosch, who uses part of the Marx/Engels quotation as a motto for his book *What Is World Literature?*: "The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrowmindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature." Damrosch seems to use the statement in a

positivist sense as proof that "the" world literature exists, or at least as a prophecy which by now has been fulfilled: "For Marx and Engels, as for Goethe, world literature is the quintessential literature for modern times."[82] A correct statement. But it is ambivalent, too, insofar as it expresses a positive evaluation in Damrosch's case, whereas such an evaluation of course does not exist in the case of Marx and Engels.[83] For this reason it is necessary to say that none of the statements is dependable that refers to said passage in the *Communist Manifesto* and then continues by offering the conclusion that Marx and Engels *promoted* and even *developed* the term. They simply acknowledged the emergence of "a world literature" and elucidated its bourgeois, capitalist context, thus shedding light on the contradictions inscribed in it.

Without doubt we must be aware of the fact that today we have a different understanding of world literature than Goethe developed in his epoch. In our time, we can discover many new approaches with regard to world literature, as one attempts to find a new access to this term. In addition, one tries to give a definition. Erich Auerbach, who complained about the loss of literary diversity in our world, raised the question: to what extent are Goethe's ideas of world literature still valid? It is obvious that the principle underlying exchange—of both symbolic and material goods—is difference. One does not exchange what one has already. Due to the increasing similarity of different literatures, the fruitful base of literary exchange gets lost, he maintained, adding that for this very reason we must attempt more determinedly to expose the differences and the diversity of literatures.[84]

Hendrik Birus opines in his essay "Goethes Idee der Weltliteratur. Eine historische Vergegenwärtigung" that the term world literature, "as used by Goethe, can neither be comprehended adequately in quantitative terms ('as comprising all individual literatures' ['alle Einzelliteraturen umfassend']) nor in qualitative terms ('the best works of these' ['die besten Werke aus ihnen'])." The decisive significance that the aspect of international interactions (thus, in fact, certain reciprocal effects or dialectical interrelationships) must be accorded becomes apparent thanks to extensive reflections by Goethe dedicated to the development of literature in 1826–1829, thus at a time when he talked optimistically about world literature.[85] Quite obviously, Goethe saw world literature above all as a phenomenon that emerged due to international communication and mutual reception. He also talked about literary exchange as "more or less free intellectual trade."[86] As Hans-Joachim Schrimpf maintained, Goethe's terms that refer to traffic, trade and commercial exchange are not just of a metaphorical nature. According to Schrimpf, Goethe thought that it was

economic "globalization" which demanded a universalization of literature: He saw the connection between world trade and world literature and he interpreted it optimistically as a factor contributing to a *rapprochement* of peoples.[87] It cannot be regarded as certain, however, that we can assume the existence of such a hypothesis concerning a causal relation between the two global phenomena in the case of Goethe, though we certainly find it expressed by Marx and Engels from the critical perspective of economic analysis. But it is possible that Goethe thought of an analogous relationship between the exchange of material commodities and an exchange of ideas and of literature.

As Conrad Wiedemann writes, the idea of world literature—propagated by the aging Goethe—did not suggest the absorption of literature by a "universal" cosmos, but respect and exchange between national literatures.[88] With regard to the *Edinburgh Review* Goethe said on one occasion: "These journals that attract a larger audience, little by little, will be contributing in the most efficient way to the hoped for general world literature." At the same time, he emphasized "that it is not maintained here at all that Nations should think in identical ways; they are only to become aware of each other, to comprehend each other, and if they cannot reciprocally love each other, they should at least learn to tolerate each other."[89] In his essay "Welthandel – Weltfrömmigkeit – Weltliteratur. Goethes Alters-Futurismus," Dieter Borchmeyer has attempted to re-interpret this "inter-national tolerance" as a utopian thought.[90] He writes:

> Here as elsewhere it becomes apparent that world literature, as seen by Goethe, was nothing that had been already achieved; it did not merely imply the familiarity of the educated with the traditions of poetry written in foreign languages – this had existed already for centuries –, it referred neither to the totality nor to the canonical ridges of national literatures, thus to a meaning attributed erroneously quite often to Goethe's term.
>
> His way of "stating a World Literature" amounts neither to a cumulative nor to a qualitative *stocktaking* of what is; it is rather the announcement of something "hoped for," thus, the utopia of a merely embryonically present – and still to be formed – common supranational literature that will result, if we want to express it in modern terms, from the interaction of the producers of literature, and that will further a new ethos of worldwide social cooperation.[91]

What is notable with regard to the relevant research literature is how often it refers to translation.[92] The Portuguese writer and winner of the Nobel Prize, José Saramago (1922–2010), once put it quite drastically:

"The author creates, with his language, national literature; world literature is made by translators."[93] Saramago owes his own worldwide fame to 45 translators. It is a centrally important hypothesis of David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* that "world literature" gains thanks to translation. He even says, "A defining feature of world literature, then, is that it consists of works that thrive in translation."[94] Its presence in more than one language and culture is thus perceived as a precondition of world literature, rather than a secondary necessity. Surely it is just as difficult to define the term translation as it is to define the term world literature. Viewed from a worldwide literary perspective, translation transports the local into a strange or foreign context; meanwhile translation is defined not simply as the mere transfer of texts, because many other factors, thus cultural and linguistic ones, have to be taken into account. William Franke accentuates the way in which translation liberates a work, while producing new meanings: "There may be an inevitable flattening through translation of particular nuances that are possible only in a given language or culture, but translation also frees a work for new associations that can engender previously unsuspected possibilities of meaning. This is why classics never finish saying what they have to say […], as Italo Calvino put it in his essay 'Why Read the Classics.'"[95]

In his utterances between 1827 and 1831 regarding an evolving world literature, Goethe saw translation as one of the most important avenues leading towards it.[96] Translated literature was recognized by him as a means of intellectual exchange between nations, and in view of its potential he regarded it highly. In a letter to Thomas Carlyle he emphasized how necessary it was: "And it is thus that every translator must be regarded: that he strives, as a mediator of this general intellectual commerce, and makes it his business, to promote reciprocal exchange. For whatever may be said about the inadequacy of translation, it is and remains nonetheless one of the most important and dignified businesses in the general setup of the world."[97] But Goethe does not only emphasize the gain that translation accords to a culture that receives translated works; he also points out the gain that the new way of seeing the translated work implies for the culture in which the work originated. This foreign perspective triggers a refreshing effect with respect to one's own texts, which may have become too familiar: "Every literature finally ends up feeling *ennui* with respect to itself if it is not refreshed by foreign intellectual and emotional involvement."[98] Goethe saw his *Faust* as a telling example; he said that he could not read it any more in German. But when he read the translation done by

Gérard de Nerval, the tragedy again appeared ingenious to him. Elsewhere, Goethe emphasizes the gain that the English translation of his *Faust* brought about: "In England, Soane [...] comprehended my *Faust* admirably and he knew how to reconcile its peculiarities with the peculiarities of his language and the demands of his nation."[99] He reports that he experienced something similar when reading a passage of the English translation of Schiller's play *Wallenstein*: "Now I encountered it suddenly in the language of Shakespeare; I became vividly aware of the great analogy of two excellent poetic souls; the first was again fresher, the same in another, and so new that it moved me again with its complete force, producing the most deeply felt emotions."[100] In a letter dated January 1, 1828, directed to Carlyle, Goethe asks him to what extent his translation of *Tasso* could be regarded as English, while again implying that the translation might bring about an added dimension, "because it's exactly these links from the original text to the translation that express most clearly the relations from nation to nation and that one must know, above all, and evaluate."[101]

Two aspects belong to world literature, seen as process: getting to know the Foreign or "Other" and seeing "the Own" mirrored in the Foreign. It is here that the dual perspective becomes apparent that manifests itself in the close interrelationship of one's own cultural identity with cultural alterity.[102] In this context it is the acknowledgment of the peculiarities of other nations that assumes a decisive role with respect to the exchange between individual countries. But *Weltliteratur*, as used by Goethe, is a dialectically constructed concept. For him, world literature was *that* literature which embraced "the generally human" ("das Allgemein- Menschliche"; "l'humain en général") as its subject matter, and which contributed to mutual understanding. Fritz Strich emphasized above all the humanist, idealist stance in his book *Goethe und die Weltliteratur* that was published shortly after World War II (in 1946). It is not merely a function pertaining to literary history but an ethical, and at the same time a social, function that is ascribed to Goethe's concept. In other words, Strich thinks that exclusively humanist reasons underpinned the concept of world literature. The deepest foundation of world literature is in his opinion "the recognition of a general, eternal humanity as the [common] bond of [all] peoples."[103] "To general humanity, within which we find the pure source of world literature, corresponds a generally-human art and science [...]."[104] For Goethe, both the specific and the general came into play, however. That which was to be exchanged in the framework of cultural exchange was characterized by a twofold aspect: It was characterized by the specific, the particular, which made it interesting,

but it was also characterized at the same time by something that was universal, insofar as that which was to be exchanged was not restricted to its particularity. This aspect was also underlined by Goethe in his conversation with Eckermann in late 1827 that was focused on Chinese literature: The Chinese, he said, "think, act, and feel almost exactly like we do; and we soon find that we are perfectly like them […]."[105] Thus it was never solely the specific, the exotic, that mattered and that could even make us feel uneasy under certain conditions. What he maintained was this: that we have to discover the general within the particular. If one was ready to get involved in the particular, "the general – seen through nationality and personality – would shine through and become apparent, more and more."[106] He emphasized the dialectics between the general and the specific again when he said that poetry is "cosmopolitan and only the more *interesting* when it shows itself as *national*."[107] Goethe's concept is inciting. It underlines the gain that literary exchange brings about, on the condition that the specific is seen in the general and the general in the specific.

"World Literature" Versus "Global Literature": What Is the Canon?

The discussion focused on Goethe's remarks about world literature is very lively at the moment. The reason for this is clear: Because the concept of world literature is at the center of the present international debate on global literature, many scholars start out with Goethe's use of the term, asking how it has evolved ever since. "Yet no single definition of world literature has secured general agreement […]."[108] On the one hand, it happens that Goethe's reflections on world literature are inflated and falsely interpreted as the expression of an implicit theory. On other occasions, the term world literature, as used by him, is viewed critically and the question is asked: what did he intend by it? And how could we use the term today? For Goethe, world literature evolved as the consequence of a historical acceleration process. But the "present, extremely change-prone epoch and certainly facilitated communication," and the "free intellectual commerce" connected with it that he described, have attained an unprecedented extent today, in view of the present globalization and internationalization of capital—something that Goethe could not anticipate but that highly influences the current concept of world literature. These dynamics are also triggering a trend towards global literature.

In a globalized world, linguistic and national frontiers become largely insignificant. National frontiers, in political, social, economic and cultural respects, seem to exist only in order to be transcended.

Whereas the Eurocentric implications of the concept of world literature, as coined by Goethe, have been repeatedly emphasized, there have also been attempts more recently to mobilize his term against the collateral damages of globalization in order thus to reconnect with the cosmopolitan tradition in a positive sense. When the now widely favored term world culture (culture mondiale, Weltkultur) is being used, this aims not only at the description of a world changed by globalization, but also at a critical intervention. And in this context, a central element of the argument that is being proposed dates back to Goethe. It is his insight that world literature thrives on difference, not sameness.[109] In his talk held in Beijing on "Ends and Beginnings of World Literature," Martin Kern has also dealt with this theme. In the context of the tension between the local and the global, he raised the question: how particularities of the local survive under the homogenizing pressures of continuing exchange, thus mutual influence, and concomitant cultural and linguistic diffusion?[110] Unmistakably, the theoretical foundation of this is prefigured in Auerbach's hypothesis, "by this [convergence], the idea of world literature would be realized and destroyed at the same time."[111] Kern critiques recent developments that run counter to Goethe's concept; in his view, the promise of world literature as a form of cultural practice that Goethe saw as a source of "mutual inspiration and influence of different contemporary literary cultures," has become very questionable. And what we are facing today is "the threat of a global literature that […] bends under the pressures of the globalized marketplace," thus preserving the dominance of a certain Anglo-American and European literature.[112] In view of this, Kern opines that a "dichotomy between world literature and global literature seems to become more urgent by the day; if world literature thrives on alterity, non-commensurability, and non-identity, global literature does the opposite: it enforces identity and conformity under a single, market-driven hegemony."[113] There exist, of course, other attitudes and utterances with regard to global literature.

In contemporary (Western) research, a general consensus prevails that one should see world literature neither as a *summa* or totality of all literatures, nor as a canon comprising the best works of the world. What is taken today to be world literature is that literature which is general, timeless, and not just regionally valid. In other words, literature must be read

beyond the frontier of a nation, by citizens of many other nations, if we are to regard it as world literature. This corresponds to the position, embraced by Fritz Strich 70 years ago, that only "such [a] literary work that [has] transcended the borders of the nation where it originated"[114] should be regarded as a part of world literature, and also to Damrosch's well-known statement that portrays world literature as "literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin."[115] It becomes apparent that world literature is now seen, to a high degree, in the sense of a normatively prescribed perspective that lets us no longer subdivide literature into primarily national subsystems; instead, one starts from an international literary field, within which diverse groups of texts and ways of writing may result. With respect to certain contemporary Slavic literatures that are multilingual and multicultural, it can be shown, for instance, that such subsystems do not only transcend national contexts; rather they—quite matter-of-factly—do not even start out from them.[116] The literatures around the Mediterranean Sea mentioned by Marián Gálik in the context of Dionýz Ďurišin's theory of "interliterary centrism" can make us well aware of this phenomenon.[117] This multilingual and multinational phenomenon can also be perceived in the formation of regional blocs with respect to literature that are due to political conditions. Before the system change in Eastern Europe occurred, Hugo Dyserinck indicated very early—with reference to Dionýz Ďurišin's assumption of a "synthesis of socialist literature"—the existence of what he called "the model of a multinational unity of individual literary entities within a supranational framework."[118]

At present, scholars see world literature primarily as contemporary literature that is no longer organized nationally. With regard to literary studies, the consequence has been above all an end to the practice of comparing individual national literatures. Today, the task is to explore the history of interrelationships and separations of literatures and of their contexts. Matthias Freise comprehends our conference in Beijing as follows:

> The central question […] was on the relation between the universal and the local. This question implicates that the phenomenon of world literature could be seen from a relational instead of from an essentialist perspective. Hence I would like to state that in order to understand what world literature is we have to understand it generally as a network of relations, not as a set of objects, for instance a set of literary texts. A central but not the only axis of these relations is the tension between the universal and the local. Objects we classify, while relations we discern as belonging to different types of rela-

> tions. From this disparity, diverging approaches to the problem of world literature emerge. Understanding world literature as a relation allows us to comprehend its processual character. World literature does not exist, but takes place.[119]

Let us come back now to global literatures, a concept that claims to overcome the separation of center and periphery with regard to literary productions, based on a global perspective, and that projects the attempt to reflect on the genesis of cultural production in transnational constellations. The way in which a multiplicity of languages and a change of countries may shape the creative activity of a writer and the texts that result is widely noticeable today, and such literature is thus rooted in several languages, cultures and regions of the world. This is also why Armando Gnisci—a scholar who takes a stand against the "global market & *uniformity-of-thought*" [sic][120] and who is convinced of the possibility of "a brotherhood/sisterhood that only now can begin to sprout from the bosom of the human being"[121]—has stressed the need for an "intercultural poetics."[122] As far as literary production is concerned, we can observe especially in Western countries that the frontiers between national literatures are increasingly dissolving. On the other hand, new literary forms and genres are appearing that do not seem to correspond to established criteria. In Europe and North America, we encounter forms of literature that can be, and perhaps must be, termed hybrid, as some comparatists assert. Gnisci, for one, spoke of (and advocates) a tendential "creolization" of Europe in this context.[123] Such literature belongs to more than one nation. This is not only true of the literature produced by Italian writers who emigrated to Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands or Switzerland; in Germany, for instance, there exists a German-Turkish literature produced by such authors as Emine Sevgi Özdamar and Feridun Zaimoglu. Or we may think of the Nobel Prize winner Herta Müller, a writer rooted in Romania and Germany, whose texts deal essentially with the Romania of the Securitate. This tendency to transcend the national is preceded by the Polish-British novelist Joseph Conrad, a writer rooted in a nation subjugated and divided at the time by three big powers, who was well aware of the globalized imperialist penetration of the world in the early twentieth century and who was one of the first in the West to question the Western concept of progress. It is also traceable in authors stemming from another subjugated nation, the language of which was almost eradicated by the British empire, as is apparent in the case of many Irish-

British and Irish-American writers and their literature. It is enough to mention here Eugene O'Neill, who was so American and yet he said about himself, "The one thing that explains more than anything about me is the fact that I'm Irish [...]." Irish-American writers like O'Neill and Frank McCourt and Irish authors writing in English in Europe like Joyce and Seamus Heaney have lost the old language, or at least do not use it in their writings, but they still reveal Irish or Gaelic (*Gaeilge*) roots and culture, together with or in contrast to their adopted culture and language. In Germany, we notice little-known writers like Carl Weissner (1940–2012) and Andreas Weiland (b. 1945), who both started to publish in English in 1967, deserting their mother tongue as a literary medium—a fact that reveals their fascination with Beat poetry as a poetically innovative expression of the North American "counter-culture" of the 1960s, or their sympathy with the Civil Rights movement, the US student movement and protest against the war in Vietnam; all of this in obvious opposition to what they saw as the reactionary cultural "climate" of their native Germany and the tame resistance offered by many German authors. Of course, such change of language may reveal also considerable alienation and stubborn rejection of German "identity," and in addition it meant that they gave up addressing a German-speaking public, turning instead to a "cosmopolitical" multilingual audience. But they gave up using the old language only to a certain extent, because Weiland and Weissner continued to translate into German and they also used both languages in their literary production later on.

Political and social transformations bring about temporal and spatial reorientations. Quite often, this happens in relation to global and transnational developments, thus having the world in mind. Slavic literatures today exist and change in the context of the demise of socialist systems and of several rather specific social transformations. Many contemporary texts produced in this context no longer refer to national, monocultural and monolingual literary traditions. Aleksandar Hemon writes in English and Bosnian, Yana Djin and Katia Kapovich in English and Russian, Gala-Dana Zinger in Russian and Hebrew; Dragica Rajčić produces texts based on "Gastarbeiterdeutsch" (the specific German spoken by immigrant workers); Oleg Jur'ev and Ol'ga Martynova write in both Russian and German; Barbi Marković transferred Bernhard's *Gehen* to Belgrade and the Serbian language of the twenty-first century. Such phenomena cause irritations, both for a strictly intrinsic, text-based approach and when regarded in the framework of the literary and cultural field in which they move and are

rooted. In this way, they free innovative energies.[124] In today's world, many authors do not feel any more that they belong to only one culture; they have a globalized identity. This is a very typical phenomenon that is connected with travel, tourism and internationality, and that can be observed everywhere. Change of language and multilingualism as well as multipolar views of the world's cultures characterize the texts written by these authors. By this, they disrupt both social and scholarly ways of focusing on the triad of language, literature and history, respectively culture.[125] There are those who opine that it is neither their origin nor their language nor their skin color that constitutes a community of authors: What unites them (or separates them) is their attitude vis-à-vis the world.

It is hardly possible not to speak about the canon and classical authors when discussing world literature. There still exists a general consensus that all those works must be regarded as world literature which have gained worldwide reception and which can be taken as significant, if not formative, with respect to the world's population. When Goethe used the term world literature, this intended a literature created in a supranational, cosmopolitan spirit. And therefore, not every work that gained widespread, seemingly international reception was to be regarded as world literature. Something that also mattered was the artistic value of the text and its influence on the literatures of the world. But we have to remember, of course, that Goethe's cosmopolitan, supranational attitude differs from cosmopolitanism as understood today: His "world" tended to be Europe.

German literary scholars have always been inclined to idolize Goethe and the significance of his concept of world literature. This tendency is deeply rooted. We often read about his attempt to overcome national literatures while also turning away from the "backward-looking 'old German patriotic' art."[126] One can interpret it in this way, in the context of the already mentioned Goethe/Eckermann quotation regarding national literature and world literature. It is along this line that Peter Goßens has argued in his monograph *Weltliteratur. Modelle transnationaler Literaturwahrnehmung im 19. Jahrhundert* (2011), which discusses, among other things, the transnational elements of Goethe's idea. In the context of the Goethe/Eckermann quotation, he writes:

> The contemporary success of a poetic work of art depends […] not only on the artistic accomplishment of its creator and on his significance for a national art. This glory, which is based on professional craftsmanship and the entertainment value of a literary work, is impermanent and has no

> relevance with regard to the idea of world poetry. The decisive question is rather whether the poet and his work manage to transcend the national cultural frontiers that condition his literary and artistic praxis.[127]

Perhaps we may recognize here Walter Benjamin's thoughts regarding the "continued existence" or "Fortleben" of a work thanks to translation, or David Damrosch's idea of the circulation of a work that belongs to world literature. But Goßens goes on to say, "Only by being aware, very early on, of his transnational role while creating his work, is it possible for a poet to make it a part of world literature."[128] A similar thought is expressed by Martin Kern's statement that world literature is not only a way of reading and an effect of reception, as Damrosch maintains: "it also is a mode of creative composition. *World literature can be written*."[129]

On the other hand, we must recognize that it is rather difficult to agree on generally accepted criteria that would allow us to decide which works must be accorded worldwide literary significance. Various nations and people reveal different, culturally determined perspectives with regard to the significance of literature. In the West, "classics" and other such words have long been endowed with a self-understood, well-defined meaning. Such terms refer first of all to the historical works of ancient authors and artists. These works and their authors are recognized, in accordance with the meaning of the word "classicus," as belonging to "the premier league" of literature. Authors of later literary epochs subscribing to the aesthetic rules of Socrates and Aristotle, trying to follow in their footsteps and thus producing significant works, are also referred to as classical authors. Moreover, they had to be cherished and regarded as significant throughout the most different times. Basically, the term refers to nothing else than the world cultural heritage, the memory of the world.[130]

The book *Die neue Weltliteratur und ihre großen Erzähler* (2013) by the well-known German literary critic Sigrid Löffler presents the opposite pole of traditional classics and gives an entirely new meaning to the term world literature. As a result of the decolonization of the 1960s and of globalization during the last three decades, a completely new, non-Western literature has originated. Authors with hybrid cultural identities tend to become the rule rather than the exception. It is exactly this phenomenon that Löffler has focused on in her book, and she presents the most important writers representing this—as she sees it—*new* world literature while placing their works into the major fields of politico-cultural conflict of our times. In her view, world literature today is that literature which is not

coming to us from Europe, North America and South America, but stemming from those countries that were ignored much too long as locations of literary production, whereas they are literally exploding with creativity. For Sigrid Löffler, world literature is global literature; it is contemporary, authentic, believable literature, produced by fresh new voices that tell real stories. It is postnational literature, migration literature, written by "commuters" moving between different languages and cultures, by refugees and descendants of former colonies or regions of crisis. Nomadic authors function as translators between different worlds. According to her, this new world literature comes alive thanks to cultural mixing, thanks to confrontations and existential themes, such as transnational migrations, loss of self, life in a foreign country and lack of recognition. One has to admit that Löffler's use of such terms as world literature or hybridity is not sufficiently clear and precise. And conceptually, much about the book—for instance, its selection criteria and the focus on the English-speaking world—is not plausible, even though the title of the book announces major insights with regard to something important. Her concept of world literature is limited and encompasses only the heirs of disintegrating empires who, driven by circumstance, are endowed with muddled identities that become the source of their creativity. This approach poses problems because the world is larger than that. Nevertheless, it is clear that Löffler's guiding idea is apparent enough and at the same time progressive. Her concept of a "new world literature" is in actual fact synonymous with a concept propagated by quite a few scholars more recently when they speak of "literatures of the world."

Quite generally, the terms *world literature* and *literatures of the world* are usually used in different, clearly separated contexts: Whereas *world literature* still implies the unquestionable significance of a work, the term *literatures of the world* intends a contemporary literature with a new orientation, that is stemming from lesser known, but exactly for this reason truly interesting regions of the world, and that is of unquestionably noteworthy quality, even though most readers are not yet fully aware of it. One can see that these literatures of the world are not defined by all means in the sense of a canon of especially high-ranking or simply widely received works. When scholars speak of literatures of the world, they think of a bigger volume of the material under review, of its irritating diversity and complexity, the parallel existence of many works and traditions, and a greater tolerance with regard to selection processes.[131]

Why Is Chinese Literature Opening Towards the Outside World? Where Next for the Chinese School?

Regarding the conference "What Is World Literature?" in Beijing, Marián Gálik's guess was that Chinese literature (and, I take it, its relation to, as well as position in, world literature) would "probably (?) be the most important issue of the meeting."[132] He is only partly right. As the organizer of this conference, I have never taken this into consideration; the announced objective of our meeting, as put forward in the invitation letter, also refrained from considering this aspect. But as a famous sinologist, Gálik, who maintains good contacts with Chinese scholars, is well aware of developments in Chinese literature and literary criticism; to that extent, his question is plausible and understandable. In addition, it is obvious that more than half of the participants in this conference are experts on Chinese literature, respectively sinologists coming from abroad. And in such a situation, especially in view of the fact that the meeting took place in Beijing, it was almost self-evident that the question voiced by Gálik had to arise. But in addition to asking this question, he has also depicted the recent development in China when he remarks that "the great progress in the Chinese economy and the opening up to the globalized world have also brought changes in the field of literature. Step by step the Chinese also searched for the ways not only to join the modern nations of the contemporary world but also to persuade especially their Euro-American colleagues that the works of Chinese literature, ancient and modern, or at least the best works, may aspire to be acknowledged as jewels of world literature."[133]

Quite obviously, Gálik reveals a strong sympathy for that Chinese quest. And indeed, it is clear that this quest also comes to light in this book, thus in the title of Liu Hongtao's essay, "How to Become World Literature? Chinese Literature's Aspiration and Way to 'Step into the World.'" The following statement by Gálik could have been enunciated in fact by quite a few contemporary Chinese scholars: "China has changed very much since 1919 and yet in the last few years it does have enough strength to 'call to arms' its scholars, to compete with the most developed country in the world in the field of humanities, namely the United States of America."[134] It is no exaggeration, I think, if I say that here we can, more or less, smell the gunpowder of a political confrontation. What is certainly revealed is a definite discontent with Western hegemony, as a

participant in this conference, Wang Ning, has pointed out in his new essay "For Whom Did the Bell Toll? The Nationality and Worldliness of Comparative Literature." With regard to Gayatri Spivak's collection of essays *Death of a Discipline*, published in 2003, which refers to what Spivak sees as the death of comparative literature as we know it, Wang Ning comes to the conclusion: "It is not difficult to answer the question 'For Whom Did the Bell Toll?': the death knell of traditional comparatist research characterized by Eurocentrism has sounded; at the same time, this is an ovation given on the occasion of the birth of a new comparatist discipline, dedicated to world literature."[135] In present-day China, the following opinion expressed by Wang Ning has representative significance:

> In the present time of globalization, the rapid development of the Chinese economy has turned China into a political and cultural superpower and it has thus directly advanced the process that lets Chinese culture and literature step into the world. Due to this, we can say that international comparative literature which is dominated by Western scholars, should by now listen attentively to the voices of Chinese scholars. In that sense, the conditions necessary for a Chinese school [of comparative literature] do already exist *de facto*.[136]

This is also the point of departure of the arguments put forward by those who do not entirely share his position. Thus, we note that the fundamental tone of the above-mentioned essay by Liu Hongtao, which provides a short overview of Chinese thinking about world literature during the last 100 years, is similar to Wang Ning's line of thought. Liu opines that "'becoming world literature' has been a constant pursuit," adding that one cannot fail to note "[t]he consequent surge of Chinese culture 'into the world.'" He applauds "the country's strategy to place Chinese literature on the world stage."[137] And the following opinion voiced by him is also representative:

> These kinds of activities and governmentally supported policies could not have been imagined 20 or even 10 years ago. This is a symbol of the current relationship between Chinese literature and world literature: having experienced the developmental modes of "grasping" (*wo na* 我拿) and "possessing" (*wo you* 我有), Chinese literature has now begun to change into the new mode of "contributing" (*wo gei* 我给). This also suggests that Chinese literature has acquired enough confidence to influence other cultures' power, and is working to project this influence by making world literature more "Chinese."[138]

"Good wine needs no bush." Why is it necessary to "place Chinese literature on the world stage"? This is what Wang Ning has to say in this regard:

> In view of the existing West-Centrism it is not realistic after all to just wait for the moment when the achievements of our research and their values will be "discovered." […] The dominant Western scholars don't feel the need to inform themselves about us. […] In the past, when we attempted to raise the banner of the Chinese school, international comparatist research that was West-centered has almost completely ignored the renaissance of Chinese comparative literature. If Chinese comparative research was occasionally mentioned, this was regarded as little more than an ornament of the text.[139]

I think that the above quotations suffice already in order to perceive the positions in question. If other, more or less similar views voiced by Chinese scholars were added here, the prevailing resentment would only become more apparent.[140] I doubt that this would be helpful.

The relation between the universal and the local is already a problem in need of reflection inscribed in Goethe's idea of world literature. As he saw it, the recognition of the different conditions and ways of thinking of another people did not mandate the demand that the nations should strive towards an increasing similarity. On the contrary, he insists on the preservation of particularities. As stated already, the relationship between the two factors is dialectical. It would weaken the universal, and might even exclude it, if too much attention were paid to the particular. The expression "making world literature more 'Chinese'" can be misunderstood very easily. The others will not accept it if it is understood as "possessing the territory." The dispersion of literature more or less has its own laws. Any overview of the reception of foreign-language literature (and of the reception of all those -isms and ideas) in China during the last 100 years will show us that what happened was fundamentally an act of "taking" or appropriating. "Receiving" is an active act, as everywhere in the world. We must comprehend that the state's project that intends to "place Chinese literature on the world stage" has not been very successful during the last 10 years, if we consider the input and the result. Why? I would like to refer here to a passage from the intervention of Lu Jiande when he commented on Damrosch's talk, but addressed primarily the Chinese audience:

> Professor David Damrosch gave us something very interesting to think about in his talk […]. He said: "Many works, however, do not take on a new meaning and new stature when read abroad, either because the language simply is not translatable without crippling losses or because their frame of reference is so exclusively local that they have little resonance abroad. Such works may be treasured and inferential within their home tradition, but never become works of world literature in any effective sense; they are read abroad, if at all, only by specialists in their culture and language of origin."
>
> I think that as Chinese scholars and literature professors and even as Chinese poets, we need to be more carefully attentive to these lines, because complaint is not enough. We could say that we should have more Chinese literary works translated in the Western world and also all over the world, and then people would immediately become admirers of Chinese literary tradition. Perhaps this is not the case; thus, we have to ask what world literature is, what kinds of preconditions would make literary works acceptable to target countries and target cultures when they are translated. That is very important.[141]

As we see, we are returning again to the question: What is world literature? In my opinion, some Chinese views and some Chinese voices that we hear in this regard are incompatible with the tendencies we observe in the world, with a new "world literature," and they are perhaps also alien to such conceptions as "global literature" or "literatures of the world." These points of view that we encounter among Chinese scholars today are essentially comparable to Eurocentrism; the perspective chosen is problematic when, instead of Europe, China is now turned into the prime point of reference. It is difficult to see how this approach relates to a true quest for world literature; what we see instead is a desire to switch roles that reveals the goal "to redraw the map of world literature."[142] Like Gálik (or is he influenced by the Chinese point of view?), some are talking about the rapidly growing economy. It does not happen very often that a connection is drawn between the stage of economic development attained by a nation and literary success. Wolfgang Kubin has pointed out in his Chap. 15 "World Literature from and in China" that literature which—"according to Goethe's comprehension"—must "belong to the entire world" is apparently regarded today by "even the best and most representative Chinese writers" as something that "should reveal a national, and that is to say, Chinese, component."[143] He adds:

> By now, the P.R. China has been spending a lot of money in order to make supposedly healthy literary works better known abroad, and it has been relying for this purpose on its own translations and publications. These publications also comprise the non-sellers of the revolution since 1942, which even at home are no longer read by anyone except a few scholars dedicated to literary studies. The political program that informs such activities is called *zouchuqu*, "going out," "going into the wide world." This new terminology signals the intention to determine for foreign readers, quite independently of "Western" sinology, which works must be considered as representative. Up to now, the initiative has not been successful. And this is not only for reasons that concern the content and for linguistic reasons […].[144]

I want to ask once more: What is world literature? The view expressed by William Franke is perceptive: "World literature [is] a means […] of undermining and breaking up national literary traditions and challenging their self-serving canons."[145] In other words, "world literature, as literature with an afterlife, is uprooted from its culture of origin and follows its trajectory to infinity in shedding light purely as literature unbounded by any specific context […]."[146] Obviously, his statement is directed against something, a different view. But I want to quote another passage from his text, in case things are not clear enough:

> World literature implies the extension of translation on a global scale beyond all regional boundaries, presumably for purposes of building a kind of literary canon. It aims to offer the finest fruits and most exquisite flowers of literary cultivation to all irrespective of their national or ethnic or regional origin. We have considered through this discussion among comparatists how becoming world literature prevents the classics from being limited to their appropriations for merely nationalistic purposes, or for the ideological aims of one specific and exclusive cultural politics. As world literature, classic works attain a wider and potentially more lasting significance.[147]

Referring to the German-speaking region, Wolfgang Kubin has said that "in contrast to Japanese literature (especially that part of it which belongs to the modern and contemporary period), Chinese literature has no stable and large audience here. Something very similar can be said about its reception in other language communities in Europe and America. It is mainly perceived in the universities, but even there sometimes only exceptionally."[148] Here I want to add something that I have already said elsewhere: "When we think of Chinese literature, translated to English or

other Western languages, we find that it has merely ‘gone out into the world,’ but it is not necessarily becoming world literature. In other words, its status as world literature is hardly confirmed when it is still mainly read by sinologists and lovers of things Chinese.”[149]

As well-known sinologists, both Wolfgang Kubin and Martin Kern have dealt with the problem of who or what determines the canon. As an expert on classical Chinese literature, Kern noted in his commentary on the speech given by Zhang Longxi that he comprehends the desire the latter expressed: that Chinese literature should become world literature, and that we “should bring the best things from our own literary traditions into world literature.” Then he added, pointedly: “What I will say—pointing to something that happens a lot in my field—is that we assimilate the ancient classics to our own needs; we always do that. This has been done for 2000 years in the ever-evolving Chinese tradition, and of course most powerfully in the early twentieth century […].” Damrosch has discussed this idea already in great detail in his book *What Is World Literature?*, Kern continued; indeed, one way of looking at world literature is to look at classics. “But if we now think about how we bring our best works to the world—and I like this model that came to my mind when I heard Professor Zhang’s comments that we send our own delegates to the United Nations of Great Books—of course one problem is, literature is not a democracy, and that is probably a good thing. But then we have to ask how we organize this United Nations of Great Books.” Kern then went on to raise such questions as: “Who determines what the canonical works are? What the classics are? Who controls the selection? And when do we do that, relative to the time of these works? How do we evaluate the literature of our own time that is by definition not yet canonical, but that must be part of world literature, too?”[150]

These are his own answers:

> Professor Damrosch has long argued for world literature as the body of texts that gains in translation. That is a very important concept, because it reverses the selection process: it is the other side that gets to decide what works for them. It is not that I get to decide what works as canonical in my own culture, which I can then bring into the world. In other words, we would have to accept to see ourselves *represented*; our own cultures, “siwen” as Confucius says—“this culture” of ours. We have to accept to see this culture represented in this United Nations of Great Books by delegates we may not really like or acknowledge, maybe. So it is the Russians who get to decide whom

> the Americans can send, it is the Indians who decide whom the Chinese can send, and so on. That seems rather difficult to accept, of course. But if you think about it, that is exactly how world literature works. It is the translators who make the decisions how to translate, and they are coming from the target language, they are not coming from the source language. So they have to figure out how our things would work in their language. How a classic survives and circulates in the world is determined by the translation, not by the original text. We do not control how our own canons enter world literature, and what they are doing there, and what meanings they attain there.[151]
>
> In this sense, a canon of world literature may well be a canon that undermines the national canon it comes from. Or, put the other way around, the national canon cannot survive in its *national* meaning as part of the world literature canon. Instead, the world literature canon has to speak back to the national canon, and has to disrupt and destroy its national meaning.[152]
>
> […] national literature for national purpose doesn't really have a passport: the passport gets lost in the nationalism of the texts.[153]

I do not know whether Martin Kern would also place views which assert that "the conditions for a Chinese school do already exist de facto" in the context of nationalism. We have already heard about such a "Chinese school" of comparative literature for decades. Until now, I have not heard a single foreign colleague refer to a Chinese school; instead I notice some whispers now and then, and I see those who turn silent. Those who whisper and those who remain silent are after all well-meaning; they show sympathies towards China. On the one hand, one must say that Eurocentrism or "Westcentrism" has a long history and that it also has a bad reputation. It is hardly possible that its echoes will suddenly cease to resound. And it is possible that those in the West still know very little about the outside world or that the outside world is not valued very highly. On the other hand, let us be outspoken and ask what is truly "Chinese." What are we supposed to write on the banner of the "Chinese school"? Always the same song about "Chinese specificity" and a "Chinese perspective"? What is that, after all? One thing seems certain: At a time when the crisis of comparative literature is not yet over, the number of scholars dedicated to comparative literature in China is impressive; in sheer quantity, they may surpass their colleagues in Europe and North America. As I see it, the most notable trait of Chinese comparative literature—like that of the population of China—is however its hugeness. Unfortunately, the quality of a school has nothing to do with the size of the staff; it is not the way it is with Chinese table tennis, where an

improvement in the level was attained on the basis of popularizing it. Among experts, everyone knows those few theoreticians of the Prague School; here the apologists cite a few examples as well, saying that we have this and that. Obviously, the others also have had this and that for a long time already, as far as methodology and epistemology are concerned. I insist on what I said years ago with regard to the so-called Chinese school: One cannot bestow this term upon oneself.[154]

The Contributions in This Book

Almost all the papers of the participants in our conference have been included in this volume, including those of Peter Fenves, Bernard Franco, Wolfgang Kubin and Monika Schmitz-Emans, who had been invited but who could not take part in the sessions for various reasons.

Bernard Franco's Chap. 2, "Comparative Literature and World Literature: From Goethe to Globalization," starts out from the beginnings, in the sense that it is introductory in character. Comparative literature develops in line with an awareness of world literature, and both share the ideal of transcending national frontiers, according to Franco. But with respect to their backdrop, objects of research and research methods, several differences may be noted. In the early nineteenth century, comparative methods were increasingly used by such disciplines as theology and philosophy, but also with respect to art and science. At the same, comparative literature originated as a discipline, turning to original versions of texts produced in other languages, in the context of other national literatures; the aim was to establish the objectivity and scientific character of literary studies. We are told that world literature, which experienced increased dispersion, belongs to all of humankind; research dedicated to it is strongly interdisciplinary in character, and it is closely connected with philology, mass migration studies, research focused on globalization and so on. Franco's text is of great value in its coverage of historical sources.

Galin Tihanov opines in his Chap. 3, "The Location of World Literature," that it is an urgent concern from an ontological respect to determine how we should localize world literature. For this purpose, he suggests four main points of reference: time, space, language and self-reflexivity. The author is well versed with regard to theories; he also pays considerable attention to the study of historical facts; he is aware of the worldwide debate regarding our subject matter; but he also takes the Central European and Eastern European theories into account. Having

provided a comprehensive account of the historical development (time) of world literature and of the processes of literary exchange and interaction (space), he continues by analyzing the location of world literature on the linguistic level, underscoring that it is of great significance to study world literature by starting from the dimension of language in order to interpret the "dissipated legacy" of modern literary theory. Finally, by introducing the concept of "self-reflexivity," the author has expressed his doubts with regard to a cosmopolitan culture and world literature: Reflections on world literature always spring from a specific and therefore also limited cultural and ideological perspective.

As announced by its title, Damrosch's Chap. 4, "Frames for World Literature," deals with important macroscopic questions. Due to its broadened concept and a gradual questioning of the limited Eurocentric epistemological method, and by turning to classics, masterpieces and windows on the world, world literature has opened up to an even wider world. The author also discusses such themes as world literature and translation, world, region, nation, and the reader. As he sees it, experts increasingly tend to regard world literature as a global phenomenon, something that he views as doubtlessly a big step forward. On the other hand, he cautions that the close connection between world literature and national traditions should not be disregarded: A reader always experiences world literature against the backdrop of his own national background; world literature in its translated form participates in the construction of national literature. World literature does not only exist outside national frontiers, it is deeply present in national literature. It is hardly possible to do correct research with regard to global world literature unless we review the wide world in a national literary context.

In his Chap. 5—"World Literature and the Encounter with the Other: A Means or a Menace?"—William Franke intends "to give a philosophical interpretation of the idea of world literature." In his view, the debate regarding the concept of world literature must reflect the question of our "encounter with the other." Otherness is not only present in others, but also in ourselves. He emphasizes that we must respect the specificity of a language and the incommensurability of cultures and thus should accept the apophatic; only then can we search, on a higher ontological plane, for true universality, and penetrate barriers of language and culture, thus attaining better mutual comprehension. Literature is a free expression of the human mind, it cannot be limited by a rigid conceptual way of thinking, it rejects "either this or that" judgments, and thus it has by its very nature a universalist tendency. Similar in this respect to what Walter

Benjamin called "pure language" (*reine Sprache*), world literature—when translated—liberates a literary work from its original cultural context; it gives rise to new relations and meanings in a new cultural context, so that literature can preserve its limitlessness and its openness, and may let us learn to respect others and ourselves and to defend at the same time the spiritual dimension and the dimension of transcendence of humankind.

I have mentioned the paper on "Ends and Beginnings of World Literature" already—it is one of two interventions by Prof. Kern at our conference. On a theoretical level, he discussed here how global literature—situated in the current of globalization that strives for sameness and eliminates difference—runs counter to Goethe's concept of world literature. He also emphasized that world literature is not only a concept of reception, it is still more a concept pertaining to production, and even an ontological category. A true work of world literature can remain free of the limitations of its source culture and it can create an "intracultural alterity," whereas it rejects integration into any cultural perspective, as can be seen in the case of the late poetry of Goethe, the early works of Bei Dao and Wang Wei's *Lu zhai* (鹿柴)—all of these have interrupted and respectively disarrayed the traditions they were part of; they have thus renewed the tradition and they became a part of world literature. Accordingly, we must take alterity into due consideration in the context of the translation and reception of world literature, and we should strive to make the particularities of the original as palpable as possible. It is only in this way that the liquidation of world literature by global literature can be avoided, and thus we may welcome instead a new beginning.

It was a great joy for us that Marián Gálik, who is already more than 80 years old and who is still around in the international scholarly public arena, took part in our discussion. In his paper, "Some Remarks on the Concept of World Literature after 2000," Gálik provided interesting comments on views uttered by some well-known scholars dedicated to the subject in question. I think that his prime concern was, however, to elucidate the relevant ideas of the Slovak doyen of comparative literature, Dionýz Ďurišin (1929–1997). Confronting us with Ďurišin's work *Čo je svetová literatúra?* (*What Is World Literature?*) that appeared in 1992, Gálik clarified Ďurišin's approach. Ďurišin developed his theory of literature, and in that context also his theoretical approach to world literature, in a way that owes much to pre–World War II Czech literary structuralism. Literature is a "system" embedded in the larger social system, but it is relatively autonomous. Hence the concept of literariness. As a system, literature evolves in history; it is a "process" and we must approach it in a "processual" way.

Because of the exchange relations between older and newer works, between works originating at the same time in the same socio-culture or nation, and between works (and entire literatures) of different socio-cultures (or nations, or areas where a given language is spoken), we have to become aware of "interliterariness"—a concept that Ďurišin was probably the first, internationally, to introduce and that he applied creatively. We must recognize "the processuality of world literature as the ultimate literary and historical unit or entity, which emerges as the outcome of genetic-contact relations, typological affinities (parallels) and interliterary communities (or commonwealths). World literature as an entity depends on our knowledge of literary and interliterary process."[155] Ďurišin was also a pioneer researching interliterary centrism or interliterary networks, for instance in the work *Il Mediterraneo. Una rete interletteria*, edited by Dionýz Ďurišin and Armando Gnisci (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2000). Gálik clarified Ďurišin's approach. Gálik's elucidation of "interliterariness" and his attempt to define the "common denominator" of world literature are thought-provoking. He also expressed his doubts by stating quite skeptically: "The problem is *for how long*, and *what* world literature means."

During the dialogue session of the conference, Zhang Longxi emphasized in his talk that scholars hailing from different traditions should introduce the classics they are familiar with to the world. In his Chap. 7, "World Literature, Canon and Literary Criticism," he emphasizes the significance of literary criticism. According to him, the world literature that was ushered in by Goethe is truly vibrant today, and this is something that stimulates literary studies enormously in diverse parts of the world. In view of the large number of literary works, Damrosch views "circulation" as a valid selection criterion when he decides whether a work is world literature; Zhang Longxi opines, however, that literary criticism is more important. He thinks that the significance of the new boom of world literature lies in the fact that we are witnessing a return to the evaluation of literature and to literary criticism, thus we are back to new research and a more profound comprehension of the canon. The basis of literary studies is the interpretation of texts, and literariness is the most important object of studies of literary criticism; it is also an indispensable path on the way to canonization.

Like Tihanov, Matthias Freise also views world literature from four perspectives, but chooses to focus it differently. In his Chap. 8, "Four Perspectives on World Literature: Reader, Producer, Text and System," he indicates above all that world literature is no static, isolated phenomenon but a network of relations. Starting out from the "tension between the

universal and the local," he studies world literature in the framework of the four relations referred to in the title of his chapter. He analyzes Damrosch's commentary on *The Dictionary of the Khazars* by Milorad Pavić in order to demonstrate that the producer of the book and the reader should pay attention to the semantics and not to the functionality of a work. It is possible to resist the unavoidable local limitations of a work if one attempts to understand it in a metaphorical and metafictional sense. He opines that metaphorization, symbolization and internalization of external conflicts in a semantic field—as seen in *The Dictionary of the Khazars*—will comprise the true meaning of world literature.

When world literature is discussed, *otherness* and *translation* seem to be essential issues. "A World of Translation," Philippe Ratte's Chap. 9, is another example. The premise of his argument is that we must first of all say what is "literature" and what is "world" if we want to experience world literature. For him, literature reveals the "world" beyond the perception of humans. And this world consists of "elseness" and "more"; it resists globalization and a state of standardization, monotony and loneliness in the digital age. Humans are basically a part of "elseness"—a thought that is similar to William Franke's consideration. Ratte opines that world literature is not a category that is opposed to national literature. Every work can become world literature; it is a "hollow" that can be filled with "elseness"—the larger its space, the greater the value. Writing, reading and translating are, all of them, de facto activities of translating. This is probably why he speaks of a "world of translation."

Whereas we have heard up to now incessantly about theories of world literature, Monika Schmitz-Emans has participated in our discussion by presenting her case study entitled "World Literature in Graphic Novels and Graphic Novels as World Literature." Since the second half of the twentieth century, the graphic novel has been seen as a new way of accomplishing an adaptation of a literary work and graphic story-telling has been recognized as an important genre of world literature. It receives considerable attention, and this both as a literary work and as a visual work of art. Subsequent to a comprehensive presentation and analysis of its development as a genre, its types, strategies of adaptation and drawing styles, Schmitz-Emans concludes that the graphic novel thrives because it can draw on the rich resources of literary traditions and texts. While it can compete with the traditional literary work thanks to its specific art, it can challenge canonized masterpieces above and beyond this—by way of parody and deconstruction—and transcends in this way the gap between mass culture and highbrow culture.

Chapter 11, "Experiments in Cultural Connectivity: Early Twentieth-Century German-Jewish Thought Meets the *Daodejing*" by Peter Fenves, deals with "transition" as a key concept, and this against the background of the confrontation of diverse cultural traditions in the industrial civilization of the West at the beginning of the twentieth century. The author has reconstructed how a number of German scholars of Jewish descent profited from Taoist doctrine while attempting a "restitution" of the faith. More precisely, Fenves accomplishes an exploration of the singular biographies and methods of interpretation of Franz Kafka, Martin Buber and Walter Benjamin, thereby revealing how they studied Taoism, and at the same time reconstructing their Jewish conception of spirit based on "Wu" or "non-action." In this way, Jewish messianism without a recognizable messiah and the Tao are connected. Thanks to a novel perspective, the text succeeds very well in elucidating the dialectical relationship of the universal and the local, but it touches also upon another important topic of the debate on world literature: Genuine comparison of cultures and a correct connection do not originate when we disparage another culture, but—as the Tao suggests—thanks to a renunciation of all intentions.

Like the paper presented by Fenves, the final group of chapters in this volume all relate to China. "Ideographic Myth and Misconceptions about Chinese Poetic Art" by Cai Zongqi deals, in a certain sense, with the influence of research conducted by comparatists; it becomes apparent that the author is interested both in the gains it entails and in certain misunderstandings. Cai critiques that in Europe and America the "ideographic myth" with regard to Chinese continues to affect Western research on Chinese poetry. It is assumed that the ideographic structure of Chinese characters is a decisive factor with regard to the literary qualities of Chinese poems. The so-called ideographic myth originated in sixteenth-century Europe; it reveals the one-sided knowledge regarding the Chinese language and culture that existed in that period, Cai says. The myth recurred in the early twentieth century in the well-known Fenollosa–Pound essay "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry" that was very influential, causing a number of scholars to study Chinese poetry from a linguistic perspective. In this regard, the opinion of François Cheng, a French scholar of Chinese descent, is very representative. Cai Zongqi has primarily critiqued the respective views of François Cheng by attempting to prove through textual analysis that the "ideographic myth" reflects neither the reality of Chinese characters nor the development of Chinese poetry.

The misunderstanding concerning the ideographic expression that is critiqued by Cai figures anew in Chap. 13 "Chinese Literature as Part of World Literature" by Karl-Heinz Pohl. According to this author, there exist old differences of opinion between East and West with regard to the question: What is literature? Therefore it matters to find out prior to a discussion of pertinent questions what a Chinese colleague understands by literature and which semantic change the concept of literature has experienced in China. Pohl opines that Chinese characters were originally pictographic and that they still preserve several facets of pictographic writing, something that endows Chinese literature with several unique stylistic devices and forms. In addition, there exists a close connection between literature and politics, due to Confucian influence. In modern times, China has been greatly influenced by Western currents, thus also its literature; simultaneously, the changing political situation caused considerable control of literature by the government. For this reason we encounter two striking phenomena in modern Chinese literature: One is either subscribing to Western criteria of literature or looking back to one's own aesthetic tradition in view of the ongoing depoliticization. In the context of world literature (something that consists today mainly of Western literatures), Chinese literature has strongly deviated from its own essential image. Because too little is known about it, and because one is restricted to one's own concept of literature, readers in the West are not aware of many Chinese authors and works.

Chapter 14, "How to Become World Literature? Chinese Literature's Aspiration and Way to 'Step into the World'" by Liu Hongtao which has already been mentioned, looks back to the way Chinese literature has wished—and attempted—to connect with the world. In the early twentieth century, Zheng Zhenduo (1898–1958) proposed the thesis of a "unified literature"; in the 1980s we were confronted with the slogan that "stepping into world literature" matters. And now, in the early twenty-first century, we hear about the "world literature factors of Chinese literature in the twentieth century" and about the difficulties that the "circulation of Chinese literature in foreign countries" encounters at present. All of this reveals an intense longing. According to Liu, this longing underwent a change from ideal to reality, from cosmopolitism to localism, from emphasis placed on imports to a new emphasis on the export of our literature. As he sees it, apart from translation, which is of course the most important route of Chinese literature to world literature, other possibilities that would allow China to figure in this field exist: They are offered by the

literature of the Chinese-speaking world; by literature produced by authors of Chinese descent; and by world literature under the influence of Chinese culture. It is necessary to say here that the literatures of these three "worlds" have very little in common with the "world" that the concept "world literature" refers to. But never mind. Chinese literature flourishes and is noticed in all of these worlds. Liu Hongtao (and quite a few other Chinese scholars) are certain that "China's growing global influence has steadily improved and spurred the nation's increasing confidence."[156]

Kubin has talked among other things about the "replacement of 'Nationalliteratur' (national literatures) – thus, of one's own heritage and achievements ('das Eigene') – by 'Weltliteratur', that is to say, the universally valid" or generally binding ("das Allgemeinverbindliche"). He says: "What is at stake is the shared human essence. In this way, the Good, Noble, and Beautiful turn into the new fatherland that is no longer identified with a concrete land or country. Writing and thinking thus attain cosmopolitical significance."[157] In his Chap. 15, "World Literature from and in China," he refers mainly to literature from China. By looking back, above all, to the reception of Chinese literature in the West, and especially in German-speaking countries, his text demonstrates a complicated tension between Chinese literature and world literature. On the one hand, Chinese literature was translated very early on into Western languages; during the time of Goethe, at the latest, it formed already a part of world literature. On the other hand, it still does not belong to the "major" literatures, and in the West its reception is more or less limited to the small circle of sinologists. In other words, it is still marginalized. Which obstacles hinder the access of Chinese literature to the world? Kubin mentions diverse reasons, thus (1.) the contradiction between an emphasis put on the national in Chinese literature on the one hand, and the supranational demands of world literature on the other hand; furthermore, (2.) the difference between the Chinese understanding of the canon and the canon that results by way of translations of Chinese works in the West; then, obviously, (3.) the discrepancies between China's political intentions and the demands of the Western book market; and also (4.) the degree of influence exerted when Western sinologists introduce Chinese literature to the world. He concludes that Chinese literature still has a long way to go before it truly becomes widely read world literature.

Two talks given during the dialogue session of the conference and two commentaries on these talks form the final section of this book. David Damrosch showed in his talk on "World Literature and Nation Building"

how world literature created by excellent artists has participated in the construction of national literature, and even in the construction of a nation by way of translation, adaptation, reception and so on. In order to provide examples, he analyzed the creative process and concrete works of the Vietnamese writer Nguyễn Du, of two protagonists of the Chinese cultural movement, Hu Shi and Lu Xun, and of the Caribbean author Derek Walcott, in order to depict the complicated position of founders of their respective national literatures with regard to world literature, their approach to it, as well as their influences and evaluations. Providing many examples, Zhang Longxi elucidated his reflections on world literature in his talk focused on "World Literature: Significance, Challenge, and Future": World literature should overcome Eurocentrism and search for effective methods of communication in order to make "the best works" of the different nations and peoples accessible to the citizens of the world. Zhang is very aware of the unequal "power" accorded to the world's languages and thus of "power" in the context of literary and cultural exchange relations between socio-cultures, their populations and their national literatures, as this affects the empirical construction of world literature and of the canon of works that belong to world literature. According to him, this also becomes apparent with regard to "the Nobel Prize in Literature. Many people complain that you have to be translated into English or a major European language in order to get the Nobel Prize, which is true, because the Nobel Prize is awarded by a group of Swedish scholars. They can only read so many languages and apparently, most of them read European languages."[158] Zhang's position in this regard appears similar to that expressed by Theo D'haen. As D'haen noted, it is hard to overlook the fact that it is above all works in English that are received in the so-called Third World because they are translated, or else adapted, imitated or rewritten, by authors of this or that "borrowing [non-Western] culture."[159] It is indeed obvious that "[t]he cumulative effect of the economic, military, and political dominance of the United States in the post-war II period, and the concomitant enhancement of the status of the English language in matters of both high and popular culture, have given a tremendous boost to English literature […] present and past."[160] As a consequence, "'the Western canon' […] has by now turned into an ideologically charged term."[161]

Apart from the factor of power and thus above and beyond this, the typical challenge faced with respect to the realization of this project is the big difference existing between different languages and cultures, and thus

the "incommensurability" and "untranslatability" that exist according to scholars like Emily Apter. Zhang maintains the position that we should view optimistically not only the future of world literature, but also the possibility of translation and the relevancy of cultural exchange.

Lu Jiande and Martin Kern as discussants commented on these two talks. Lu Jiande ("The Interactions between the Local and the Universal") pointed out that the two interlocutors of the dialogue have mentioned the relations of power apparent in past research on world literature in their talks. He thinks that we should analyze the underlying causes. With regard to Damrosch's chapter "Frames for World Literature," he underlined that one should take into account different perspectives of translation and different frames when reflecting on the relationship of certain national literatures to world literature. This would also be useful for our knowledge of the history of the development of certain national literatures. Martin Kern's contribution, entitled "Who Decides the 'United Nations of Great Books,'" emphatically clarified his reflections on the question of a canon of world literature. Because this text has already been discussed above, I will not come back to it here.

I do not want to conclude this introduction without expressing my deeply felt gratitude to all those who took part in our symposium (including the ones who could not be present). They made this congress possible, thanks to their contributions. I have learned a lot from their interesting papers that have proved stimulating, leading to new ideas. My old friend, the bilingual poet and scholar Andreas Weiland, who compiled the index and read the manuscript of this introduction, has made quite a few valuable suggestions; I remain indebted to him for these comments and for his participation in the critical review of this volume.

References

1. Cf. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003; Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, transl. by M.B. DeBevoise, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004 (Original version: Pascale Casanova: *La République mondiale des lettres*, Paris: Le Seuil, 1999); Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*, Princeton: The Princeton University Press, 2006; John Pizer, *The Idea of World Literature: History and Pedagogical Practice*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006; Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, *Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literatures*, New York: Continuum, 2008; Dieter Lamping, *Die Idee der Weltliteratur: Ein*

Konzept Goethes und seine Karriere, Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 2010; Peter Goßens, *Weltliteratur. Modelle transnationaler Literaturwahrnehmung im 19. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 2011; Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading*, London: Verso, 2013; Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, London: Verso, 2013; Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, London: Verso, 2015.

2. Matthias Freise, "Four Perspectives on World Literature: Reader, Producer, Text and System", in this book, p. 202.
3. Édouard Glissant, "Àpropos de Tout-Monde. Ein Gespräch mit Ralph Ludwig" (Aug. 17, 1994), quoted from: *Tout-Monde: Interkulturalität, Hybridisierung, Kreolisierung: Kommunikations- und gesellschaftstheoretische Modelle zwischen "alten" und "neuen" Räumen*, ed. by Ralph Ludwig and Dorothee Röseberg, Bern: Peter Lang, 2010, p. 10. In their interpretation of *Tout-Monde*, Ludwig and Röseberg have especially clarified the following point in an enlightening manner: Glissant, they say, is consciously embracing a view of the world that is replacing the negative and thus problematic tendencies inscribed in globalization by a positively characterized chaos model that makes possible non-hierarchical relationships between the elements of the Diverse, while the net is not rigid but a continuous process. A basic experience that serves as a starting point of *Tout-Monde* is discovered in the Babylonian multiplicity of communications and languages that is seen as liberated from the "odiousness of the Negative." Seen abstractly and generalized in the form of a social model, *Tout-Monde* signifies exactly the repudiation of the *identitaire*, of hierarchically structured notions of culture, and of a closed, rigid social order. (R. Ludwig and D. Röseberg, "Einleitung" (Introduction), in: *Tout-Monde: Interkulturalität* …, ibidem, p. 9, 10.)
4. Cf. Martin Kern, on "Ends and Beginnings of World Literature," in his Beijing talk. His essay will be published in the journal POETICA, Vol. 49, ISSN: 0303-4178; E-ISSN: 2589-0530 (forthcoming).
5. Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading*, ibidem, p. 46.
6. Cf. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (2003); Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," in: *New Left Review* 1 (Jan.–Feb. 2000), pp. 54–68.
7. Franco Moretti, "Modern European Literature: A Geographical Sketch," in: F. Moretti, *Distant Reading*, ibidem, p. 39.
8. Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," in: F. Moretti, *Distant Reading*, ibidem, p. 46.
9. This is a position shared by Theo D'haen when he states that "World literature […] is no longer literature that matters in Europe […]." Theo D'haen, "World Literature, Postcolonial Politics, French-Caribbean Literature", in: Jean Bessière, Littératures francophones et politiques. Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2009, p. 64. See also: Cosmopolitanism and the

postnational: literature and the New Europe. Ed. by César Domínguez and Theo D'haen. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

10. Franco Moretti, "Evolution, World-Systems, Weltliteratur," in: *Studying Transcultural Literary History*, ed. by Gunilla Lindberg-Wada, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006, p. 120.
11. Erwin Koppen, "Weltliteratur", in: *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, ed. by Klaus Kanzog and Achim Masser, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984, p. 815. – The German text says, "Wie die meisten Begriffe und Kategorien des Literaturwissenchaftlers, entzieht sich auch die Konzeption der Weltliteratur einer verbindlichen Definition oder präzisen inhaltlichen Festlegung."
12. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (2003), ibidem, p. 281.
13. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (2003), ibidem, p. 4.
14. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (2003), ibidem, p. 300.
15. Cf. Gesine Müller, "Einleitung: Die Debatte *Weltliteratur – Literaturen der Welt*", in: *Verlag Macht Weltliteratur: Lateinamerikanisch-deutsche Kulturtransfers zwischen internationalem Literaturbetrieb und Übersetzungspolitik*, ed. by Gesine Müller, Berlin: Tranvía-Walter Frey, 2014, p. 7.
16. See David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (2003), p. 70.
17. Cf. Gesine Müller, "Einleitung: Die Debatte *Weltliteratur – Literaturen der Welt*", ibidem, p. 7–8.
18. David Damrosch, "Frames for World Literature", in this book, p. 95.
19. See Marián Gálik, "Some Remarks on the Concept of World Literature after 2000", in this book, p. 156.
20. See David Damrosch, "World Literature and Nation-building", in this book, pp. 311ff.
21. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 46–47.
22. Cf. Christopher Prendergast, "The World Republic of Letters," in: *Debating World Literature*, ed. by Ch. Prendergast, London and New York: Verso, 2004, pp. 1–25.
23. Cf. Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres*, Paris: Le Seuil, 1999, p. 64.
24. Manfred Koch, *Weimaraner Weltbewohner. Zur Genese von Goethes Begriff "Weltliteratur"*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002.
25. Norbert Christian Wolf, "De la littérature nationale à la littérature mondiale: la trajectoire de Goethe", in: *Champ littéraire et nation*, ed. by Joseph Jurt, Freiburg: Frankreich-Zentrum, 2007, pp. 91–100.
26. Cf. Joseph Jurt, "Das Konzept der Weltliteratur – ein erster Entwurf eines internationalen literarischen Feldes?", in: *"Die Bienen fremder Literaturen": der literarische Transfer zwischen Großbritannien, Frankreich*

und dem deutschsprachigen Raum im Zeitalter der Weltliteratur (1770–1850), ed. by Norbert Bachleitner, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012, pp. 31–32.

27. Alexander Beecroft, "World Literature without a Hyphen. Towards a Typology of Literary Systems," in: *New Left Review* 54 (Nov.–Dec. 2008).
28. Alexander Beecroft, "World Literature without a Hyphen. Towards a Typology of Literary Systems," ibidem, p. 100.
29. Regarding Beecroft's idea of world literature, see also Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day*. Ibidem.
30. Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, ibidem, p. 6.
31. Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, ibidem, p. 3.
32. Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, ibidem, p. 16.
33. Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, ibidem, pp. 320–342.
34. With regard to the wide-ranging and prolonged debate on world literature, see, in addition to the already mentioned scholarly works, *Debating World Literature*, ed. by Christopher Prendergast, London: Verso, 2004; *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. by Theo D'haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012; *World Literature in Theory*, ed. by David Damrosch, Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.
35. Cf. Gauti Kristmannsson, "Die Entdeckung der Weltliteratur", in: *Übersetzer als Entdecker: Ihr Leben und Werk als Gegenstand translationswissenschaftlicher und literaturgeschichtlicher Forschung*, ed. by Andreas F. Kelletat and Aleksey Tashinskiy, Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2014, pp. 352–353.
36. Many scholars, thus for instance Bernard Franco, David Damrosch and Zhang Longxi in this book, refuse to acknowledge a Eurocentric tendency that may be implied in Goethe's concept of literature, and they emphasize above all his cosmopolitanism.
37. See Hans J. Weitz, "'Weltliteratur' zuerst bei Wieland", in: *Arc*adia 22 (1987), pp. 206–208.
38. Cf. Wolfgang Schamoni, "'Weltliteratur' - zuerst 1773 bei August Ludwig Schlözer", in: *Arcadia* 43, no. 2 (2008), pp. 288–298; Schamoni notes that the Scandinavian scholar Gauti Kristmannsson had pointed out already in 2007 in his essay "The Nordic Turn in German Literature" (*Edinburgh German Yearbook*, vol. 1, 63–72) that Schlözer had used the term. The decisive quotation of Schlözer had been included and appraised

decades earlier in Sigmund von Lempicki's *Geschichte der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1920, new and expanded edition 1968, p. 418.

39. August Ludwig von Schlözer, *Isländische Litteratur und Geschichte*, Göttingen, Gotha: Dieterichs, 1773.
40. August Ludwig Schlözer, *Isländische Litteratur und Geschichte*, quoted from Wolfgang Schamoni, "'Weltliteratur' – zuerst 1773 bei August Ludwig Schlözer", p. 289. In German, he said: Es gibt eine Isländische Litteratur aus dem Mittelalter, die für die gesamte *Weltlittteratur* eben so wichtig, und großenteils außer dem Norden noch eben so unbekannt, als die Angelsächsische, Irrländische, Rußische, Byzantinische, Hebräische, Arabische, und Kinesische, aus eben diesen düstern Zeiten, ist. Emphasis by me.
41. Cf. Gauti Kristmannsson, "Die Entdeckung der Weltliteratur", pp. 359–360; Galin Tihanov, "The Location of World Literature," in this book, p. 87.
42. Johann Gottfried Herder, "Ueber die neuere Deutsche Litteratur. Erste Sammlung von Fragmenten. Eine Beilage zu den Briefen, die neueste Litteratur betreffend (1767)", in: *Sämtliche Werke I*, ed. by Bernhard Suphan, Berlin 1877, p. 148.
43. Cf. Manfred Koch, *Weimaraner Weltbewohner*, p. 89.
44. Manfred Koch, *Weimaraner Weltbewohner*, p. 116.
45. Cf. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters,* ibidem, pp. 75–81.
46. Cf. Andreas F. Kelletat, *Herder und die Weltliteratur. Zur Geschichte des Übersetzens im 18. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984.
47. Cf. Joseph Jurt, "Das Konzept der Weltliteratur - ein erster Entwurf eines internationalen literarischen Feldes?", p. 23.
48. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe (Frankfurt edition)], 40 vols., ed. by Friedmar Apel, Hendrik Birus [et al.], Frankfurt/Main 1986–1999, Vol. 14, p. 445.
49. Cf. Gauti Kristmannsson, "Die Entdeckung der Weltliteratur", p. 355.
50. Bernard Franco, "Comparative Literature and World Literature: From Goethe to Globalization," in this book, p. 68.
51. Fritz Strich, *Goethe und die Weltliteratur*, Bern: Francke, (1946) 1957, p. 31.
52. Egon Friedell, *Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit*, München: dtv, 1976, Vol. 2, p. 883.
53. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, in: F. Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, München: dtv, 1980, II, p. 448f. (The quoted passage says in German: Wie Beethoven über die Deutschen hinweg Musik

machte, wie Schopenhauer über die Deutschen weg philosophierte, so dichtete Goethe seinen Tasso, seine Iphigenie über die Deutschen hinweg. Ihm folgte eine sehr kleine Schar Höchstgebildeter, durch Alterthum, Leben und Reisen Erzogener, über deutsches Wesen Hinausgewachsener: – er selber wollte es nicht anders.)

54. Dieter Lamping, *Die Idee der Weltliteratur. Ein Konzept Goethes und seine Karriere*, ibidem, p. 11. (In German, this passage maintains that Goethe "den Ausdruck bei verschiedenen Gelegenheiten ins Spiel gebracht und es dabei durchweg bei knappen Andeutungen belassen [hat]. Mustert man seine verstreuten Bemerkungen, so wird schnell deutlich, dass er Verschiedenes unter ‚Weltliteratur' verstand, wenngleich er ein Verständnis deutlich vorzog.")
55. Dieter Lamping, *Die Idee der Weltliteratur. Ein Konzept Goethes und seine Karriere*, ibidem, p. 11. (In German: Diese Vieldeutigkeit mag mitunter etwas verwirrend sein, zumal wenn der Ausdruck selbst von Literaturwissenschaftlern in ganz unterschiedlichen Bedeutungen, aber immer unter Berufung auf Goethe verwendet wird. Seine Äußerungen über Weltliteratur lassen sich jedoch durchaus in eine sinnvolle Ordnung bringen.)
56. Those 20 instances where we see Goethe using the term Weltliteratur have been listed systematically in Fritz Strich, *Goethe und die Weltliteratur*, ibidem, pp. 369–372 and in Xavier Landrin, "La semantique historique de la Weltliteratur: Genèse conceptuelle et usages savants", in: *L'Espace culturel transnational*, ed. Anna Boschetti, Paris: Nouveau Monde Editions, 2010, pp. 96–99.
57. Goethe was in close touch with the French journal *Le Globe*. It has been shown that 295 articles in his copy of *Le Globe* have doubtless been read by Goethe; 202 of these articles are graced by his marginalia. See Heinz Hamm, *Goethe und die französische Zeitschrift "Le Globe". Eine Lektüre im Zeitalter der Weltliteratur*, Weimar: Böhlau, 1998, p. 15. This remarkable French journal was only one of several that dominated the literary and artistic debate in France between the demise of Napoleon's empire and the revolution of 1830. As John Boening notes, the period "between 1818 and the late 1820s" saw the formation of various conservative and liberal literary and artist groups in France. Thus, the royalist and Christian romantics clustered "around the *Conservateur littéraire*" founded in 1820, with Victor Hugo and his brother as dominant figures, and around the equally conservative *Muse française* (founded in 1823), which motivated a "counter grouping by the liberals, including Stendhal" to start the journal *Mercure du XIX siècle* also in 1823. *Le Globe* was founded by liberals a year later. See John Boening, "The Unending Conversation. The Role of Periodicals in England and on the Continent during the Romantic Age",

in: Steven P. Sondrup, Virgil Nemoianu in collaboration with Gerald Gillespie (eds.), Nonfictional Romantic Prose: Expanding Borders. Amsterdam NL / Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2004, p. 294. It was in *Le Globe* that Prosper Duvergier wrote that in the arts and literature, "as elsewhere, the Ancient Regime battles against the new." See Benjamin Walton, "The Professional Dilettante: Ludovic Vitet and *Le Globe*", in: Roger Parker, Mary Ann Smart, Reading Critics Reading: Opera and Ballet Criticism in France from the Revolution to 1848, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 75. According to Walton, we can find many statements by contemporaries that underline "*Le Globe*'s seriousness and quality […], most famously from the ageing Goethe," who told Eckermann that he counted it "among the most interesting periodicals" and that he "could not do without it." Walton points out that the journal, which was noted widely at the time for "its very fair-mindedness, combined with its eclecticism," was compelled to remain "officially apolitical until the relaxation of government censorship in July 1828," but nonetheless it "struck a distinctive political tone" very early on. He adds, "This perceptible stance was in part a consequence of the period, when politics infected every corner of intellectual production." See Benjamin Walton, ibidem, p. 73.

58. *Goethe: Werke* [Weimarer Ausgabe (Weimar edition)], München: dtv, 1987, Vol. 11, p. 8. (In German: An Schuchardt diktirt bezüglich auf französische und Welt-Literatur.)
59. "Goethe an Cotta" (26. 1. 1827), in: *Goethe: Werke* [Weimarer Ausgabe], Vol. 42, p. 27. (In German: Auf die ausländische Literatur muß man besonders jetzt hinweisen, da jene sich um uns zu bekümmern anfangen.)
60. "Goethe an Streckfuß" (27. 1. 1827), in: *Goethe: Werke* [Weimarer Ausgabe], Vol. 42, p. 28. (In German: Ich bin überzeugt daß eine Weltliteratur sich bilde, daß alle Nationen dazu geneigt sind und deshalb freundliche Schritte thun.)
61. His journal *On Art and Antiquity* (*Über Kunst und Alterthum*), founded in 1816, was for a period of 16 years an important means of communication which made possible numerous contacts, but which also intended to exert a normative function. It was clearly his publication; two-thirds of the contributions were by him. Goethe saw it as an essential task of all the freshly thriving journals to dedicate themselves to the translation, interpretation and criticism of foreign literatures. In his journal, he did not only inform about foreign poesy, but he told his audience continually how German works were received abroad.
62. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 12, p. 356. (In German: Die Mittheilungen, die ich aus französischen Zeitblättern gebe, haben nicht etwa allein zur Absicht, an mich und meine Arbeiten zu erinnern, ich bezwecke ein Höheres, worauf

ich vorläufig hindeuten will. Überall hört und lies't man von dem Vorschreiten des Menschengeschlechts, von den weiteren Aussichten der Welt- und Menschenverhältnisse. Wie es auch im ganzen hiemit beschaffen seyn mag […], will ich doch von meiner Seite meine Freunde aufmerksam machen, daß ich überzeugt sei, es bilde sich eine allgemeine Weltliteratur, worin uns Deutschen eine ehrenvolle Rolle vorbehalten ist.)

63. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 12, p. 952. (In German: Ich sehe mich daher gern bei fremden Nationen um und rate jedem, es auch seinerseits zu tun. National-Literatur will jetzt nicht viel sagen, die Epoche der Welt-Literatur ist an der Zeit und jeder muß jetzt dazu wirken, diese Epoche zu beschleunigen.)
64. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 22, p. 724–725. With regard to the early use of the concept of world literature, cf. Hendrik Birus, "Goethes Idee der Weltliteratur. Eine historische Vergegenwärtigung", in: *Weltliteratur heute. Konzepte und Perspektiven*, ed. by Manfred Schmeling, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1995, p. 11–12, and the relevant passages in Bernard Franco, "Comparative Literature and World Literature: From Goethe to Globalization," in this book.
65. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 13, p. 175. (In German: "Chinesische, Indische, Ägyptische Alterthümer sind immer nur Curiositäten," notierte er. "Es ist sehr wohlgethan sich und die Welt damit bekannt zu machen; zu sittlicher und ästhetischer Bildung aber werden sie uns wenig fruchten.")
66. "Goethe an Riemer" (25. 5. 1816), in: Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 7, p. 594. (In German: Verbleiben Sie in den griechischen Regionen, man hat's nirgends besser; diese Nation hat verstanden aus tausend Rosen ein Fläschchen Rosenöl auszuziehen.)
67. Cf. Gauti Kristmannsson, "Die Entdeckung der Weltliteratur", ibidem, p. 362.
68. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 12, p. 225. (In German: Aber auch bei solcher Schätzung des Ausländischen dürfen wir nicht bei etwas Besonderem haften bleiben und dieses für musterhaft ansehen wollen. Wir müssen nicht denken, das Chinesische wäre es, oder das Serbische, oder Calderon, oder die Nibelungen; sondern im Bedürfnis von etwas Musterhaftem müssen wir immer zu den alten Griechen zurückgehen, in deren Werken stets der schöne Mensch dargestellt ist. Alles übrige müssen wir nur historisch betrachten und das Gute, so weit es gehen will, uns historisch daraus aneignen.)

69. *Wilhelm von Humboldt an Goethe* (15. 5. 1821), in: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Briefwechsel mit Wilhelm und Alexander von Humboldt*, ed. by Ludwig Geiger, Berlin: Bondy, 1909, p. 247f. (In German: Ich kann ihr keinen Geschmack abgewinnen, und bleibe immer dabei, daß das Griechische und Römische gerade die Höhe und Tiefe, die Einfachheit und die Mannichfaltigkeit, das Maß und die Haltung besitzt, an die nichts anderes je reichen wird, und über die man nie muß hinausgehen wollen [...].)
70. *Wilhelm von Humboldt an Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker* (Anfang 1826), in: Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Briefe an F. G. Welcker*, ed. by Rudolf Haym, Berlin: Gärtner, 1859, p. 134. (In German: ich hoffe Gelegenheit zu finden, es einmal recht ordentlich zu sagen, daß die Griechische Sprache und das Griechische Alterthum das Vorzüglichste bleiben, was je der menschliche Geist hervorgebracht hat. Was man vom Sanskrit rühmen mag, das Griechische erreicht es nicht, auch ganz einfach, als Sprache, nicht. Das wird immer mein Glaubensbekenntniss sein [...].)
71. Regarding the ways this concept is used in comparative literature, see Landrin, "La semantique historique de la Weltliteratur: Genèse conceptuelle et usages savants", ibidem, pp. 79–95.
72. Cf. Joseph Jurt, "Das Konzept der Weltliteratur - ein erster Entwurf eines internationalen literarischen Feldes?", ibidem, p. 43–44.
73. Cf. René Étiemble, *Essais de littérature (vraiment) générale*, Paris: Gallimard, 1974, p. 15.
74. See Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 22, p. 938.
75. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 22, p. 427. (In German: […] hoffnungsreiches Wort: das bey der gegenwärtigen höchst bewegten Epoche und durchaus erleichterter Communication eine Weltliteratur baldigst zu hoffen sey […].)
76. "Goethe an Zelter" (4. 3. 1829), in: Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 11, p. 99.
77. The other term that he employs in such a context is communication, in the dual sense of material (economic) and intellectual exchange.
78. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 12, p. 866. (In German: Wenn nun aber eine solche Weltliteratur, wie bey der sich immer vermehrenden Schnelligkeit des Verkehrs unausbleiblich ist, sich nächstens bildet, so dürfen wir nur nicht mehr und nichts anders von ihr erwarten als was sie leisten kann und leistet.) Goethe went on by saying: was der Menge zusagt, wird sich grenzenlos ausbreiten und wie wir jetzt schon sehen sich in allen Zonen und Gegenden empfehlen; dies wird aber dem Ernsten und eigentlich Tüchtigen weniger gelingen.

79. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 12, p. 866–867. (In German: Die Ernsten müssen deshalb eine stille, fast gedrückte Kirche bilden, da es vergebens wäre der breiten Tagesfluth sich entgegen zu setzen; standhaft aber muß man seine Stellung zu behaupten suchen bis die Strömung vorüber gegangen ist.)
80. Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels, *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, in: Marx-Engels-Werke, Vol. 4, Berlin: Dietz, 1974, p. 466. I quote the relevant passage from the English-language edition: "The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, [...] has resolved personal worth into exchange value [...] [F]or exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted *naked, shameless, direct, brutal* exploitation. [...] It has *converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers*. The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has *reduced the family relation to a mere money relation*. [...] The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. [...] [I]t has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. [...] In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature. The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. [...] It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce *what it calls civilisation* into their midst, i.e., to become *bourgeois* themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image." Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848), URL https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm, accessed Aug. 30, 2016. Emphasis by me.
81. Cf. Gauti Kristmannsson, "Die Entdeckung der Weltliteratur", ibidem, p. 356–357.
82. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, ibidem, p. 4.
83. Cf. Gauti Kristmannsson, "Die Entdeckung der Weltliteratur", ibidem, p. 357.

84. Cf. Erich Auerbach, "Philologie der Weltliteratur", in: *Weltliteratur: Festgabe für Fritz Strich zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Walter Muschg and Emil Staiger, Bern: Francke, 1952, p. 39–50.
85. Hendrik Birus, "Goethes Idee der Weltliteratur. Eine historische Vergegenwärtigung", ibidem, p. 11. This "communicative dimension of the term world literature as used by Goethe" has been emphasized especially by Peter Weber, "Anmerkungen zum aktuellen Gebrauch von 'Weltliteratur'", in: Günther Klotz, Winfried Schröder and Peter Weber (eds.), *Literatur im Epochenumbruch. Funktionen europäischer Literaturen im 18. und beginnenden 19. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, Weimar 1977, p. 533–542, especially p. 536–539.
86. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 22, p. 957. When Goethe spoke of such a "mehr oder weniger freyen geistigen Handelsverkehr," this echoes in a way the free trade debate in England (where "most remnants of old *dirigisme* were gradually removed from the 1820s," see Lars Gustafson, Nation, State and the Industrial Revolution: The Invisible Hand. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 86). And it anticipates the connection that Marx and Engels established in 1848 between a bourgeoisie that "got the upper hand," free trade, Western bourgeois commercial penetration of the world market, and world literature.
87. Cf. Hans-Joachim Schrimpf, *Goethes Begriff der Weltliteratur*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1968, p. 45–47.
88. Cf. Conrad Wiedemann, "Deutsche Klassik und nationale Identität. Eine Revision der Sonderwegs-Frage", in: *Klassik im Vergleich. Normativität und Historizität europäischer Klassiken*, ed. by Wilhelm Vosskamp, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1993, p. 562.
89. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 22, p. 491. (In German: Diese Zeitschriften, wie sie nach und nach ein größeres Publikum gewinnen, werden zu einer gehofften allgemeinen Weltliteratur aufs Wirksamste beitragen. Goethe added, daß nicht die Rede sein könne, die Nationen sollen überein denken, sondern sie sollen nur einander gewahr werden, sich begreifen und, wenn sie sich wechselseitig nicht lieben mögen, sich einander wenigstens dulden lernen.)
90. Dieter Borchmeyer, "Welthandel - Weltfrömmigkeit - Weltliteratur. Goethes Alters-Futurismus" (Festvortrag zur Eröffnung des Goethezeitportals in der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München am 19.01.2004). p. 3; see Goethezeitportal. URL: http://www.goethezeitportal.de/db/wiss/goethe/borchmeyer_weltliteratur.pdf, accessed Aug. 31, 2016.
91. Dieter Borchmeyer, "Welthandel – Weltfrömmigkeit – Weltliteratur. Goethes Alters-Futurismus," ibidem, p. 3. (In German: Deutlich ist hier wie immer, daß Weltliteratur für Goethe noch nichts Erreichtes ist, daß sie nicht

nur die Vertrautheit des Gebildeten mit der Tradition fremdsprachiger Poesie meint - sie gab es schon seit Jahrhunderten -, also weder die Gesamtheit noch den kanonischen Höhenkamm der Nationalliteraturen bezeichnet, in welchem Sinne Goethes Begriff oft mißverstanden wird. Seine „Statuierung der Weltliteratur" ist weder eine kumulative noch qualitative Bestandsaufnahme, sondern Ankündigung eines „Gehofften", die Utopie einer erst in Ansätzen vorhandenen, noch zu „bildenden" gemeinsamen nationenübergreifenden Literatur – die modern gesagt aus der Interaktion der Literaturproduzenten hervorgeht und ein neues Ethos weltweiten gesellschaftlichen Zusammenwirkens fördert.)

92. In his essay "Die Entdeckung der Weltliteratur" (p. 350), Gauti Kristmannsson has criticized the fact that most recently published research has failed to deal in more detail "with the immense theoretical works of translation science produced during the last decades." He added, "It does not suffice to point, here and there, to Walter Benjamin and George Steiner, before speaking extensively about world literature and translation."
93. In: Wolfgang Runkel, "Im Wort stehen", in: *Die Zeit*, No. 43, 10/1997, p. 14.
94. David Damrosch, "Frames for World Literature," in this book, p. 95.
95. William Franke, "World Literature and the Encounter with the Other: A Means or a Menace?" in this book, p. 139.
96. Regarding the following, cf. Joseph Jurt, "Das Konzept der Weltliteratur - ein erster Entwurf eines internationalen literarischen Feldes?", ibidem, p. 37.
97. "Goethe an Carlyle" (20. Juli 1827), in: *Goethe Werke* (Weimarer Ausgabe), Vol. 42, p. 270. (In German: Und so ist jeder Übersetzer anzusehen, daß er sich als Vermittler dieses allgemein geistigen Handels bemüht, und den Wechseltausch zu befördern sich zum Geschäft macht. Denn, was man auch von der Unzulänglichkeit des Übersetzens sagen mag, so ist und bleibt es doch eins der wichtigsten und würdigsten Geschäfte in dem allgemeinen Weltwesen.)
98. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 22, p. 428. (In German: Goethe betont aber nicht nur den Gewinn, den die Übersetzung für die Kultur bringt, in die übersetzt wird, sondern auch den Gewinn, den der neue Blick der Übersetzung für die Kultur bringt, aus der übersetzt wird. Diese fremde Perspektive bringt eine Auffrischung der eigenen Texte, die einem zu vertraut sind: „Eine jede Literatur ennüyirt sich zuletzt in sich selbst, wenn sie nicht durch fremde Theilnahme wieder aufgefrischt wird. *Theilnahme* can be understood in the sense of *Anteilnahme* (emotional and intellectual involvement) and in the sense of *participation*.)

99. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 22, p. 949. (In German: In England hat […] Soane meinen *Faust* bewunderungswürdig verstanden und dessen Eigenthümlichkeiten mit den Eigenthümlichkeiten seiner Sprache und den Forderungen seiner Nation in Harmonie zu bringen gewusst.)
100. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 22, p. 490. (In German: Nun aber trat es mir auf einmal in der Sprache Shakespeare's entgegen, die große Analogie zweyer vorzüglicher Dichterseelen ging mir lebhaft auf; es war das erste frischer wieder, dasselbe in einem andern, und so neu, dass es mich wieder mit seiner völligen Kraft ergriff und die innerlichste Rührung hervorbrachte.) This may help to elucidate Franke's view: "There is a necessary letting go of one's own culture in order to let great works operate as world literature. Only when we receive our own literature back from others has it truly become world literature for us, too. But then it comes back to us radically changed in its fundamental significance." (William Franke, "World Literature and the Encounter with the Other: A Means or a Menace?" in this book, p. 139.)
101. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 22, p. 935. (In German: denn eben diese Bezüge vom Originale zur Übersetzung sind es ja, welche die Verhältnisse von Nation zu Nation am allerdeutlichsten aussprechen und die man zu Förderung der vor- und obwaltenden Weltliteratur vorzüglich zu kennen und beurtheilen hat.)
102. Cf. Fawzi Boubia, "Goethes Theorie der Alterität und die Idee der Weltliteratur. Ein Beitrag zur neueren Kulturdebatte", in: *Gegenwart als kulturelles Erbe*, ed. by Bernd Thum, München: Iudicium, 1985, p. 272.
103. Fritz Strich, *Goethe und die Weltliteratur*, ibidem, p. 11. (In German: die Erkenntnis der allgemeinen, ewigen Menschlichkeit als des Bandes der Völker […].)
104. Fritz Strich, *Goethe und die Weltliteratur*, ibidem, p. 51. (In German: Es ist der allgemeinen Menschlichkeit, in der die reine Quelle der Weltliteratur zu finden ist, eine allgemein menschliche Kunst und Wissenschaft […].)
105. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 12, p. 223. (In German, he said that the Chinese […] denken, handeln und empfinden fast ebenso wie wir, und man fühlt sich sehr bald als ihresgleichen […].)
106. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 22, p. 433. (In German: durch Nationalität und Persönlichkeit hin jenes Allgemeine immer mehr durchleuchten und durchscheinen sehen.)
107. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* [Frankfurter Ausgabe], Vol. 22, p. 964. (In German he said that poetry is: weltbürgerlich und um so mehr *interessant* als sie sich *national* zeige.)

108. David Damrosch, “Frames for World Literature,” in this book, p. 94.
109. See Fawzi Boubia, “Goethes Theorie der Alterität und die Idee der Weltliteratur: Ein Beitrag zur neueren Kulturdebatte”, ibidem, p. 279–296.
110. Martin Kern, on “Ends and Beginnings of World Literature,” ibidem.
111. Erich Auerbach, “Philologie der Weltliteratur,” ibidem, p. 39. (In German: damit wäre der Gedanke der Weltliteratur zugleich verwirklicht und zerstört.)
112. Martin Kern, “Ends and Beginnings of World Literature,” ibidem.
113. Martin Kern, “Ends and Beginnings of World Literature,” ibidem.
114. Fritz Strich, *Goethe und die Weltliteratur*, ibidem, p. 14.
115. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, ibidem, p. 4.
116. Focused on this theme, a conference took place on Nov. 13 and 14, 2014 at the Justus Liebig University in Gießen. It was entitled “Slavische Literaturen der Gegenwart als Weltliteratur. Hybride Konstellationen.” On the recent development of Slavic literatures, see *Die slavischen Literaturen heute*, ed. by Reinhard Lauer, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000 (Opera Slavica NF 36).
117. Cf. Marián Gálik, “Some Remarks on the Concept of World Literature after 2000,” in this book, p. 164, footnote 9; cf. also Ivo Pospíšil and Miloš Zelenka (eds.), *Centrisme interlittéraire des littératures de l’Europe centrale*, Brno: Masarykova universita, 1999; Dionýz Ďurišin and Armando Gnisci (eds.), *Il Mediterraneo. Una rete interletteria*, Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2000. See also: Armando Gnisci, *Studi europei e mediterranei*, Roma: Bulzoni, 2008.
118. Hugo Dyserinck, *Komparatistik. Eine Einführung* (1977), Bonn: Bouvier, 1981, p. 70. (In German, Dyserick’s text referred to Ďurišin’s hypothesis of a Synthese der sozialistischen Literatur, in order to then speak of a Modell der multinationalen Einheit von einzelliterarischen Entitäten in einem supranationalen Rahmen […].)
119. Matthias Freise, “Four Perspectives on World Literature: Reader, Producer, Text and System,” in this book, p. 191.
120. Gnisci writes that it is necessary to oppose “the universal circulating of injustice, discrimination and oppression that is called ‘global market & unified thought’” (“la circolare universale dell’ingiustizia, della discriminazione e dell’oppressione che si chiama ‘mercato globale & pensiero unico’”). Armando Gnisci, *Una storia diversa*. Roma: Meltemi, 2001, p. 8.
121. See Armando Gnisci, *Una storia diversa*. Ibid., p. 8.
122. “La letteratura delle migrazione e un fenomeno che interessa i mondi e i rapporti tra i mondi del mondo della fine del XX secolo dell’era cristiana e dell’inizio del XXI. […] Un fenomeno che si puo cogliere e studiare,

scorgere e definire, assecondare e concorrerne la corsa, solo se si possiede e si pratica una poetica interculturale." ("Literature of migration is a phenomenon that concerns the worlds and relations between worlds of the late twentieth century of the Christian era and of the early twenty-first century. […] A phenomenon that one can only get hold of and study, decipher and define, support and accompany in its course if one possesses and practices an intercultural poetics.") Armando Gnisci, *Creolizzare l'Europa: Letteratura e migrazione*. Roma: Meltemi editore, 2003, p. 8. Such an intercultural poetics also implies that we must tackle "the theme of identity or rather, deconstruction of identity." Franca Sinopoli, "Migrazione/letteratura: due proposte di indagine critica", in: http://ww3.comune.fe.it/vocidalsilenzio/sinopoli.htm. Accessed Jan. 12, 2017. Franca Sinipoli collaborated with Armando Snisci on several books on migrant literature and also on the literature of the world/world literature, thus *La letteratura del mondo nel XXI secolo*, Milano: Mondadori, 2010.

123. Armando Gnisci, *Creolizzare l'Europa: Letteratura e migrazione*. Roma: Meltemi editore, 2003. Gnisci has tackled the "literature of migration" and of migrants in a number of books. See also: Armando Gnisci, Nora Moll, *Diaspore europee & lettere migranti: Primo Festival Europeo degli Scrittori Migranti, Roma, giugno 2002*. Roma: Edizioni Interculturali, 2002; Armando Gnisci, *Nuovo planetario italiano: geografia e antología della letteratura della migrazione in Italia e in Europa*. Troina: Città Aperta Ed., 2006. His book *La letteratura italiana della migrazione* (Roma, 1998) was perhaps the first one in Europe on this subject of literature of migrants living in (at least) two "worlds."
124. Cf. the "Conference Manual" of the above-mentioned conference on "Slavische Literaturen der Gegenwart als Weltliteratur. Hybride Konstellationen," and Reinhard Lauer (ed.), *Die slavischen Literaturen heute*. Ibidem.
125. Cf. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, ibidem; Ottmar Ette, *Über Lebenswissen. Die Aufgabe der Philologie*, Berlin: Kadmos, 2004; Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, *Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literatures*. London: Continuum, 2008.
126. Dieter Lamping, *Die Idee der Weltliteratur. Ein Konzept Goethes und seine Karriere*, ibidem, p. 66. (In German, the author speaks of the rückwärtsgewandten "altdeutsch patriotischen" Kunst.)
127. Peter Goßens, *Weltliteratur. Modelle transnationaler Literaturwahrnehmung im 19. Jahrhundert*, ibidem, p. 24. (In German: Dieser Ruhm, der auf handwerklichem Können und dem unterhaltenden Wert eines literarischen Werkes beruht, ist vergänglich und für den Gedanken der Weltpoesie nicht weiter von Bedeutung. Entscheidend ist hier vielmehr die Frage, ob es dem Dichter und seinem Werk gelingt, die nationalkulturellen Grenzen, von denen seine literarische wie künstlerische Praxis geprägt ist, zu überwinden.)

128. Peter Goßens, *Weltliteratur. Modelle transnationaler Literaturwahrnehmung im 19. Jahrhundert*, ibidem, p. 24. (In German: Nur mit dem frühzeitigen Blick auf seine transnationale Rolle hat der Dichter schon bei der Entstehung des Werkes die Möglichkeit, dieses zu einem Bestandteil der Weltliteratur zu machen.)
129. Martin Kern, "Ends and Beginnings of World Literature," ibidem.
130. Cf. Bernard Franco, "Comparative Literature and World Literature: From Goethe to Globalization," in this book, p. 68.
131. Cf. Gesine Müller, "Einleitung: Die Debatte *Weltliteratur – Literaturen der Welt*", ibidem, pp. 10–11.
132. Marián Gálik, "Some Remarks on the Concept of World Literature after 2000," in this book, p. 158.
133. Marián Gálik, "Some Remarks on the Concept of World Literature after 2000," ibidem, p. 159.
134. Marián Gálik, "Some Remarks on the Concept of World Literature after 2000," ibidem, p. 160.
135. Wang Ning, "For Whom Did the Bell Toll? – The Nationality and Worldliness of Comparative Literature," in: *Exploration and Free Views*, 2016, No. 7, p. 38. (Original:王宁:《丧钟为谁而鸣——比较文学的民族性与世界性》,载《探索与争鸣》2016年第7期.)
136. Wang Ning, "For Whom Did the Bell Toll? – The Nationality and Worldliness of Comparative Literature," ibidem, p. 37.
137. Liu Hongtao, "How to Become World Literature? Chinese Literature's Aspiration and Way to 'Step into the World'," in this book, p. 291.
138. Liu Hongtao, "How to Become World Literature? Chinese Literature's Aspiration and Way to 'Step into the World'," ibidem, pp. 291f.
139. Wang Ning, "For Whom Did the Bell Toll? – The Nationality and Worldliness of Comparative Literature," ibidem, p. 37.
140. On resentment in modern Chinese history, see Fang Weigui, "Nach der Verletzung des nationalistischen Prinzips – 150 Jahre Ressentiment in China," in *Minima Sinica. Zeitschrift zum chinesischen Geist*, 2/2002, pp. 1–27. Also: Fang Weigui, "After the Nationalism Principle Has Been Humiliated: 150 Years of Chinese Resentment," in: *Journal of Social Sciences* (05/2006), pp. 18–31.(Originally published in Chinese: 方维规:《民族主义原则损伤之后:中国一百五十年羡憎情结》,载《社会科学》2006年第5期,第18–31页.)
141. Lu Jiande, "The Interactions between the Local and the Universal," in this book, p. 328.
142. Wang Ning, "For Whom Did the Bell Toll? – The Nationality and Worldliness of Comparative Literature," ibidem, p. 38.
143. Wolfgang Kubin, "World Literature from and in China," in this book, p. 302.
144. Wolfgang Kubin, "World Literature from and in China," ibidem, p. 304.

145. William Franke, "World Literature and the Encounter with the Other: A Means or a Menace?," in this book, p. 132.
146. William Franke, "World Literature and the Encounter with the Other: A Means or a Menace?," ibidem, pp. 138f.
147. William Franke, "World Literature and the Encounter with the Other: A Means or a Menace?," ibidem, p. 139.
148. Wolfgang Kubin, "World Literature from and in China," ibidem, p. 305.
149. Fang Weigui, "The Tide of Literature," in: *Chinese Literary Criticism*, 3/2016, p. 105.(Original:方维规:《文学的潮汐》,载《中国文学批评》2016年第3期.)
150. Martin Kern, "Who Decides the 'United Nations of Great Books'," in this book, p. 350.
151. Martin Kern, "Who Decides the 'United Nations of Great Books'," ibidem, pp. 350f.
152. Martin Kern, "Who Decides the 'United Nations of Great Books'," ibidem, p. 353.
153. Martin Kern, "Who Decides the 'United Nations of Great Books'," ibidem, p. 353.
154. Fang Weigui, "Einführung des Übersetzers", in: Hugo Dyserinck, *Komparatistik. Eine Einführung* [Comparative Literature: An Introduction], translated to Chinese by Fang Weigui, Beijing Normal University Publishing Group, 2009, p. 13. (方维规"译序", 狄泽林克:《比较文学导论》, 方维规译, 北京师范大学出版社, 2009年.)
155. Marián Gálik, "Some Remarks on the Concept of World Literature After 2000", in this book, p. 148.
156. Liu Hongtao, "How to Become World Literature? Chinese Literature's Aspiration and Way to 'Step into the World'," in this book, p. 291.
157. Wolfgang Kubin, "World Literature from and in China," in this book, p. 302.
158. Zhang Longxi, "World Literature: Significance, Challenge, and Future", in this book, p. 338.
159. Theo D'haen, "World Literature, Postcolonial Politics, French-Caribbean Literature", in: Jean Bessière (ed.), *Littératures francophones et politiques*, Paris : Éditions Karthala, 2009, p. 65. As editor, Theo D'haen has come back to the problem of a possibly very different empirical importance of the world's languages in the book *Major versus Minor? Languages and literatures in a globalized world*, edited by Theo D'haen, Iannis Goerlandt and Roger D. Sell. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2015.
160. Theo D'haen, "World Literature, Postcolonial Politics, French-Caribbean Literature", ibid, p. 66.
161. Theo D'haen, "World Literature, Postcolonial Politics, French-Caribbean Literature", ibid, p. 65.



CHAPTER 2

Comparative Literature and World Literature: From Goethe to Globalization

Bernard Franco

During the romantic era, the historians of comparative literature, especially those belonging to French criticism, have often noticed the simultaneous birth of that discipline and of the ideal of "world literature" defended by Goethe. There is a common literary ideal behind both relationships to literature; indeed, a will to go beyond the national frame. The way Goethe formulated this ideal in his 1827 interview with Eckermann is well known: He says that the time of national literature is over and that the time of world literature has come.

It may be easier to study the emergence of comparative and world literature successively.

The Birth of Comparative Literature

Romantic criticism is based on questioning the universality of Beauty. The introduction of an aesthetic relativism went along at the time with a necessarily historical approach linking literary forms with forms of civilization. In his *Course on Dramatic Literature*, August Wilhelm Schlegel reminds us that according to the ancient Greeks, the origins of tragedy are linked

B. Franco (✉)
Directeur de l'UFR de Littérature française et comparée, Sorbonne, Paris, France

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_2

with a religious function, the celebration of a god, and that the history of drama cannot be understood without a history of spirituality. In his review of Schlegel's book published in the *Journal de l'Empire* in 1814, Charles Nodier, on the contrary, recalls the classical dogma so as to refute Schlegel: "Beauty is unique, invariable, unalterable."

The emergence of the new discipline of comparative literature was at the time—and still is—understandable through the new way of dealing with literature that was then evolving. There may be something arbitrary in this way of trying to find the birth certificate of a discipline, the foundations of which are linked to the new relationship with literature that romantic criticism had established. Opposite to Laharpe's and Marmontel's disdain for comparison (they are the two main European critics of the eighteenth century), we find the productive use that Madame de Staël made of it in her *De l'Allemagne* (1813) and Benjamin Constantin in his translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein* (1809).

The richness of such a use of comparison reveals itself in the very first years of the nineteenth century, thus for example in Abbé Tressan's *Mythologie comparée avec l'histoire* in 1802, in Degerando's *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie* in 1804, in Villers's *Erotique comparée* in 1806 and in Sobry's *Cours de peinture et de littérature comparée* in 1810. But two "courses" were really founders of the discipline: François Noël's and Guislain de Laplace's *Cours de littérature comparée*, published in 1804 and re-edited in 1816, and Villemain's *Tableau de la littérature française du XVIII siècle* that appeared in 1827 and 1828, introduced as "a study in comparative literature" looking for the English roots of French literature. Goethe, in Weimar, took them as proof of the emergence of an international understanding, as he wrote in both his diary and his letters.[1] In a letter to Carl Jügel, dated May 16, 1828, he writes that he is interested in Villemain's course published in the 26th issue of the Globe—a newspaper then released in shorthand—and asks for a copy of it. After having read it, he praises it in a letter to Sulpiz Boisserée on October 3, 1830.[2]

Indeed, one is used to thinking of 1830 as a year of emergence, not only linked to Fauriel's election to the "littérature étrangère" chair of the Sorbonne, but also to the inaugural speech of Jean-Jacques Ampère—the physicist André-Marie Ampère's son—a few months earlier, on March 12, at the Athénée of Marseille. In his paper for the 1868 issue of the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, Sainte-Beuve sees the day of Ampère's speech as the founding date of the discipline.[3]

In his speech, Ampère gives shape to the ideal of "a comparative history of arts and literature of all peoples" out of which a "philosophy of literature and the arts" would emerge. Two years later, he says at the Sorbonne: "We shall make it, Sirs, this comparative study without which the history of literature cannot be completed." His assertion stresses a scientific necessity. In the following year, in the foreword of *Littératures et voyages*, Ampère writes that his works belong to the history of comparative literatures.[4] Still later, in 1834, he declares at the Collège de France: "What I decided to expose in front of you is the history of French literature compared to other literatures."[5]

It is well known that the idea of a comparative literature did merely follow the emergence of a series of comparative sciences, in the context of a general shift of the relationship to knowledge that made comparison the necessary broadening required in order to attain scientific objectivity. One knows that the very name "comparative literature" was coined after the term "comparative anatomy" had just been invented by Cuvier, comparison then being used by him as a way to increase the scientific nature of the whole process of his research. In his long study entitled "The Name and Nature of Comparative Literature," René Wellek has found a reference to a much older work, as far back as 1765, entitled *A Comparative Anatomy of Brute Animals*,[6] but Cuvier was the only one who went as far as actually thinking of a new science. He saw "comparison" as the best way to "rank" "phenomena and beings" in the universe.[7]

One could focus on the presuppositions of comparative anatomy and compare both editions of Cuvier's *Le Règne animal distribué d'après son organisation*: that of 1816 and the 1829 one. In the first one, Cuvier writes that the story of comparative anatomy should describe "the laws of the organization of animals and of the modifications this organization undergoes within different species." In the second one, he shows, in a deeper way, the value of comparison, considered as the most fruitful process, and consisting in "successively observing the same body in the different positions nature puts it in, or in comparing different bodies until one is able to recognize the constant links between their structures and the phenomenon they reveal." Such a process and such a method allow "the statement of certain laws which rule these relationships and which are used as the ones which were determined by sciences in general."[8] Comparison is thus made a foundation of the scientific method. This is how comparative sciences, and especially comparative anatomy, came to influence literary analysis.[9]

The idea of generalization was the aim of the comparative method and became the foundation of comparative literature. Other comparative sciences also emerged with the same aim: Blainville had imagined a comparative physiology (1833) and Coste a comparative embryology (1837).[10] As a matter of fact, Ampère himself links the discipline he wants to create to natural sciences in his Marseille Athénée discourse: "One has to establish, as in botany and zoology, series of natural families among the items one ranks, and not arbitrary divisions."[11]

The Elaboration of the Notion of "World Literature"

On the other hand, the emergence of comparative literature goes along with the emergence of "world literature" (*Weltliteratur*) that Goethe had called for. It is true that Goethe did not really invent the notion. In the very first book about comparative literature, edited in 1886,[12] Posnett already writes that its origins lie in Herder's *Voice of the Peoples in Songs*. Yet, it is Goethe who elaborated the concept and gave it its impact, doubtless because he did so at a time which—thanks to the invention of comparative literature—could hear and answer him. The reference text is the interview with Eckermann on January 31, 1827. This famous part of it is generally remembered: "Talking about national literature does not mean much today. We are going towards a time of World literature and each of us has to hasten this event." What Goethe meant by *Weltliteratur* is in fact very different from comparative literature. World literature deals with the circulation of literatures through nations. It does not consist in studying these very circulations. It studies the masterpieces of all literatures as a kind of heritage of humankind. Great works could belong to the whole of humankind through translations and become a cultural heritage beyond nations. In the same way that comparative literature encountered other comparative sciences at the time, World literature was born simultaneously with other notions adhering to the same universalist ideal, thus Kant's *Weltanschauung* (vision of the world), Herder's *Weltgeschichte* (history of the world), Schelling's *Weltseele* (soul of the world)—all of them expressing a holistic idealism.[13]

One cannot fail to notice the co-emergence of an "idea"—the idea of a world literature—and of a "discipline" around 1827.[14] There obviously is no historical coincidence involved in the simultaneous emergence of the discipline and of its object. The link is to be analyzed mainly in terms of

the relationships between Goethe and Ampère. The *Globe* newspaper, founded in 1826, played an important role between the two, and also with regard to the maturing and further elaboration of the concept of world literature. The newspaper—its name meant much—took Goethe's opinions very much into account. When Goethe exclaimed, with regard to a French adaptation of his play *Torquato Tasso*, "I am sure that a World literature is emerging," the *Globe*, in its November 1 issue, quoted his words, while understanding "World" literature as meaning "European" or "Western" literature. Goethe, when reading this, re-used the idea in his *About Art and Antiquity*, wishing for easier means of communication to make a "world literature" happen as soon as possible.[15]

From Europe to the World

The concept of "world literature," as used in the theories of the comparatists, partly comes from the will to widen the field of comparative literature further than Europe alone. Still, it was quite soon that Goethe's commentators noticed an ambivalence inscribed in the ideal of a world literature, which he partly developed due to a consciousness of the identity and unity of European literature. As early as 1915, Else Beil quoted a note in her PhD thesis that she extracted from the interviews collected by Biedermann, where Goethe talks to the poet Willibald Alexis, on August 12, 1829: "Once again, during our talk, he mentioned a common World or European literature, one of his favorite issues in the winter of a life still full of fantasy." Victor Klemperer draws the following conclusion about the relationships between World and European literature:

> European literature or World literature – that is the question. When using the word and the concept of World literature, Goethe was the first to feel, to name and to really show us, and thus make everybody aware of, something which later grew: European literature.[16]

Eva Kaufmann suggests that in 1827, world literature had indeed a European dimension and that the concept stands for "the international exchange of contemporary literature"; when used again today, it refers to "*all* parts of the World, in the full sense of the word."[17] Whatever Goethe's European ideal, the hypothesis of a European limitation of Goethe's perspective seems indeed very weak. Still, in the debate of contemporary criticism about world literature, Emily Apter semantically defines the notions

and their implications: "World literature" "stands for the great comparatist tradition of encyclopedic mastering and academic ecumenism"; "the World Republic of Letters" is related to "a France-centered republican ideal of universal excellence," according to Pascale Casanova's notion of a "Greenwich literary meridian"; "Cosmopolitism" is part of Kant's vision of a perpetual peace enlightened by everybody's cultures; "planetarity," a notion with which Gavatri Spivak ended her intellectual progression in *Death of a Discipline*, would "cure what is global from its capitalist hybris"; the "World literary systems" notion that Franco Moretti, inspired by Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein, linked with his conception of world literature implies that it relies "on networks of cultural circulation, on literary networks and on transpositions of literary genres"; "literature-World" means the "refusal of the post-colonial sectorizations of the literary field." Emily Apter also notices that the *Routledge Companion to World Literature*, edited in 2012, has quite a transdisciplinary program, aiming at the presentation of the "disciplinary relationship between World literature and such fields as philology, translation, diasporas and globalization studies."[18]

World literature has gone a long way since Goethe's description of his ideal. It has undergone deep changes, which are to be understood in the context of the changes in the humanities, in their methodologies as well as in their fields of application in a post-colonial world. Pascale Casanova's *République mondiale des Lettres*, initially edited in 1999, was a turning point and is one of the references in the debate. Its starting point is the idea of the creation of an "international literary space" since the sixteenth century, when literature "became a common issue," spreading from a standard-imposing France. The French standard came to be challenged at the end of the eighteenth century, and this especially with the "Herderian revolution." It was a development that led to the creation of other literary centers, especially London; and from the nineteenth century onwards, to the participation of the competition system of the American continent. Finally, a third phase evolved—linked, as it were, to decolonization, which was "making legitimacy and literary existence a possibility for each and every country." The literary space shaped in this way gave birth to a "World Republic of Letters," "with its specific consecration authorities" "in the field of literary recognition"; a Republic which, on the other hand, contradicts this pacified representation of the world that is known everywhere as "globalization." Since it builds the idea of literature and literary recognition on standards or canons of which it is the custodian, this

Republic is also a market, and Pascale Casanova quotes Antoine Berman who notices that the emergence of a *Weltliteratur* coincides "with that of a *Weltmarkt*" (world market).[19]

Such a suggestive way of shedding light on literature as an international phenomenon submitted to international standards has its obvious drawbacks and the reception of the book, itself international, made Pascale Casanova aware of it. She wrote a foreword for the second edition, where she acknowledges the book to be very "French" since it situates literature at the core of a "globalizing way of thinking." This is indeed so, and it is a way of putting such a holistic conception of literature into perspective, especially through the recognition that there is a "transnational space around the notion of World literature itself, while the terms, tools and issues of it are involved in a process of elaboration."[20] This is the reason why the book became a topic of discussion in the context of all contemporary thinking about world literature. But its France-centered basis and—what is still worse from the comparatist point of view—its European foundation that seems to bring the "World Republic of Literature" on the way to a European dictatorship are its obvious limits.

Emily Apter significantly uses the adjectives the other way around, evoking its "European perspective (and more specifically France-centered perspective)." The very principle of such an analysis makes her disapprove of some trends of world literature celebrating "national and ethnic differences" and "marketed identities,"[21] deficiencies Pascale Casanova had already pointed out. One may also confront Casanova with Etiemble's objection, voiced in 1975, that challenged then current conceptions of world literature which he had found to be Eurocentric: "what about a literary theory that is neglecting Arabic and Indian rhetorics and withdrawing from Chinese as well as Japanese works?"[22] He recalled that, centuries before the emergence of Europe, or even before the glory of Greco-Latin Letters, Chinese literature had made itself an unavoidable center, almost forgotten by today's studies about world literature.

Goethe himself was not devoid of ambivalence in his elaboration of the notion of *Weltliteratur*. David Damrosch reminds us that during his January 29, 1827 interview with Eckermann, Goethe had on the one hand talked about both the Persian poet Hafiz and Horace, that he recalled the resemblance of a Chinese novel and his *Hermann and Dorothea* or Richardson's novels, that he compared the purity of this novel with Béranger's licentious songs, but that on the other hand he would think of

Greek poetry as a universal reference, while he would celebrate German poetry of the Middle Ages, along with Serbian poetry, just one year earlier as an expression of barbarity.[23] Likewise, Victor Klemperer notices that Goethe, in an 1822 paper entitled "Individual Poetry," wrote how it was difficult for popular poetry to "obtain the universal recognition" it aims at and that he did not consider the "domestic tones" as real poetry that "Voß had given to his *Louise*." Klemperer also points to Else Beil, who noticed that Goethe's travel to Italy had "convinced him of the dominating exemplarity of Antiquity."[24] As a matter of fact, Goethe's positions mentioned here predate the elaboration of the concept of world literature in 1827; this is especially true of the journey to Italy, which took place 40 years earlier. Nevertheless, we are likely to observe the ideal of world literature with wariness because of these ambiguities. Victor Klemperer demonstrates the relativity of this so-called universal vision. On the one hand, he recalls that "for Herder's circle, whatever came from India was nearer to nature and to the beginnings than any European creation." He also writes about the Romantic Eduard Stucken who flees from the European present, calling him a 'true Romantic' and someone 'who enjoys the differences of far-away countries in the exotic light of tropical nature.' But even this taste for exoticism has its suspect side. Inspired by Mexican sources, Stucken elaborates a theory about human space grounded on five circles which lead humans from individual space to divine immensity. But "the art and knowledge which make him think about the five circles as a universal whole are classically European and romantically German."[25]

Still, Hendrik Birus noticed that Goethe had formed his ideal of a world literature in "post-Napoleonic Europe."[26] He may have thought of it—as Cyrus Hamlin has shown—as an alternative to romantic historicism that he took for a product of nationalism.[27] The idea of world literature had been elaborated while writing the *West-Eastern Divan*, a collection of poems originally written as a multi-level dialogue—between him and his beloved, him as a poet and his model—by the Persian poet Hafiz, who was thus made the standard or point of departure from which Goethe wrote a dialogue, also between past and present, between Islam and Christianity, between the East and the West. This pattern is represented by the Gingko Biloba, a tree with doubly lobed, double-shaped leaves, about which Goethe wrote a famous poem, founding world literature on the refusal of any center. Finally, before he was ending his collection, parting from his reader with a lullaby ("Good Night"), he wrote a last long poem about the "Seven Sleepers of Ephesus," to be found in the 18th Surat of the

Koran. The Seven—who never are seven, the six favorites of the court being joined by a shepherd and followed by a dog—sleep for centuries in a cave which might also be an inversion of Plato's. Then they walk out of it, reversing the order of generations and illustrating the ideal of a poetry which, having refused to be deprived of freedom, is being born again for future generations. Understood in this way, *Weltliteratur* is built on the refusal of any standard, regardless of whether such a standard would be founded on a time in history or on the domination of a culture.

Such is the conclusion: The historical relationships between comparative and world literature seems to lie in a common will to understand literature outside and above national frames. But these relationships hide differences between both points of view concerning literature. World literature sees literature as the world's heritage, thus belonging not only to the nation and the time where and when it was born, but also to the world and to posterity. Translation is its vector. On the contrary, comparative literature deals with passages and cares for the historical context and, in a philological approach, for the language.

The differences between both may have consequences in academic traditions of the world. Studying world literature in an American university means studying translated works and is intended for "undergraduate studies." Comparative literature, studying original versions, is for "postgraduate studies." In Central European countries, national literature departments are to be found where works are studied in their original language at the same time as the language itself, but also world literature departments where all literatures are studied in translation. A common idea remains: Literature is a world heritage of humankind.

References

1. Fernand Baldensperger, "Comparative Literature. The Word and the Thing", *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, vol. I, n° 1, Jan.-March 1921, pp. 5–29; ref. p. 8 and p. 15. See also Hendrik Birus, "The Co-emergence of *Weltliteratur* and *littérature comparée*", in: Reingard Nethersole (ed.), *Comparative Literature in an Age of Multiculturalism*, vol. I des *Actes* du XVIe Congrès de l'AILC: "Transitions and Transgressions in an Age of Multiculturalism", 13–19 Aug. 2000, Pretoria, Unisa Press, 2005, pp. 26–35; ref. p. 31.
2. See Hendrik Birus, *ibid*.
3. See Daniel-Henri Pageaux, *La Littérature générale et comparée*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1994, p. 7.

4. See Fernand Baldensperger, "Comparative Literature: the Word and the Thing", *loc. cit.*, pp. 8–9.
5. See Yves Chevrel, *La Littérature comparée*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 6e éd., 2009, p. 98.
6. See René Wellek, "The Name and Nature of Comparative Literature", in: *Discrimination: Further Concepts of Criticism*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970.
7. Roger Bauer, "Comparatistes sans Comparatisme", in: Mario J. Valdes, Daniel Javitch, A. Owen Aldridge (ed.), *Comparative Literary History as Discourse. In Honour of Anna Balakian*, Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt a.M., New York, Paris, Wien, Peter Lang, 1992, pp. 41–47; quotations p. 41 and p. 43.
8. Georges Cuvier, *Le Règne animal distribué d'après son organisation pour servir de base à l'histoire naturelle des animaux et d'introduction à l'anatomie comparée*, Paris, éd. de 1916: "Préface", t. I, p. 5; ed. 1829–1830, Vol. I, "Introduction", p. 6. See Roger Bauer, "Comparatistes sans Comparatisme", *loc. cit.*, p. 44.
9. See Roger Bauer, "Origines et métamorphoses de la littérature comparée", in: Roger Bauer, Douwe Fokkema et Michael de Graat (ed.), *Proceeding of the XIIth Congress of ICLA* [1988], München, Iudicium Verlag, 1990, 5 Vol., Vol. I, pp. 21–27.
10. See Fernand Baldensperger, "Comparative Literature: the Word and the Thing", *loc. cit.*, p. 14.
11. Jean-Jacques Ampère, *Littérature et voyages*: *Allemagne et Scandinavie*, Paris, Paulin, 1833, p. 29.
12. Hutcheson Maucaulay Posnett, *Comparative Literature*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1886.
13. Hendrik Birus, "The Co-emergence of *Weltliteratur* and *littérature comparée*", *loc. cit.*, p. 26.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
15. Regarding these remarks, see Hendrik Birus, *ibid.*, p. 30.
16. Else Beil, *Zur Entwicklung des Begriffs Weltliteratur*, PhD thesis, Leipzig, 1915, pp. 79–80. Victor Klemperer, *Littérature universelle et littérature européenne [essai]* (1929), trad. Julie Stroz, Paris, Circé, 2011, p. 13.
17. Eva Kaufmann, "Weltliteratur des 20. Jahrhunderts in der Lehrerausbildung", in: Roger Bauer et Douwe Fokkema (dir.), *Space and Boundaries in the Teaching of Comparative Literature/ Espace et frontières dans l'enseignement de la littérature générale et comparée*, Vol. 5 of *Proceedings of the XIIth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association* in five volumes, München, Iudicium Verlag, 1990, pp. 213–218; quotation p. 214.
18. Emily Apter, *Against World Literature*, *op. cit.*, p. 41 and p. 3.

19. Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres* [*The World Republic of Letters*, 1999], Paris, Le Seuil, 2nd ed., 2008, pp. 29–33. She quotes Antoine Berman, *L'Epreuve de l'étranger. Culture et traduction dans l'Allemagne romantique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984, p. 92.
20. Foreword to the 2008 edition, *ibid.*, p. XV-XVI. The date of the Foreword is June 2008.
21. Emily Apter, *Against World Literature*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–2.
22. René Etiemble, *Essais de littérature (vraiment) générale*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
23. See David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–13.
24. Victor Klemperer, *Littérature universelle et littérature européenne*, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–11. He mentions Else Beil, *Zur Entwicklung des Begriffs Weltliteratur*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
25. Victor Klemperer, *Littérature universelle et littérature européenne*, *op. cit.*, p. 110 and p. 117.
26. Hendrik Birus, "Auf dem Wege zur *Weltliteratur* und *Littérature comparée*. Goethes *West-östlicher Divan*", in: Jean-Marie Valentin and Jean-François Candoni (ed.), *Akten des XI. Internationalen Germanistenkongresses Paris 2005.* Band 1: *Ansprachen – Plenarvorträge – Podiumsdiskussionen – Berichte*, Bern-Berlin-Bruxelles-Frankfurt a.M.-New York-Oxford-Wien, Peter Lang, 2007, pp. 61–81; ref. p. 67.
27. Cyrus Hamlin, "Literary History and Tradition: the Importance of Goethe's *Weltliteratur* for Comparative Literature", in: Eva Kushner et Roman Struc (ed.), *La littérature comparée aujourd'hui*: *théorie et pratique […]*, *op. cit.*, pp. 87–91; ref. p. 88.



CHAPTER 3

The Location of World Literature

Galin Tihanov

In the last 10 years or so since the publication of David Damrosch's path-breaking book *What Is World Literature?*,[1] one has come to recognize the need to begin to locate the various facets of the currently prevalent Anglo-Saxon discourse of "world literature" with more conceptual rigor. The first imperative, it seems to me, is to pose the question: Where is "world literature" ontologically? Some believe it to be an attestable network of texts that enter into a myriad of however complex and mediated, but still ultimately demonstrable, relations that reveal—or sometimes conceal—the hard facts of canon formation, cultural propaganda, ideological indoctrination, the book trade and so on, aided in this especially by the process of globalization. Others, on the other hand, understand "world literature" to be above all a prism through which to analyze literature, a "mode of reading." (Sometimes these two beliefs coexist in the same body of works, making them prone to conceptual confusion.) A third option, often coexisting with the other two, is to practice "world literature" as an intellectual

This article is an abridged version of my article, "The Location of World Literature", published in the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 2017, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 468–481.

G. Tihanov (✉)
School of Languages, Linguistics and Film, Queen Mary
University of London, London, UK
e-mail: g.tihanov@qmul.ac.uk

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_3

discourse with clear ideological subtexts, frequently liberal and cosmopolitan. How we actually understand "world literature," as an attestable reality of texts or as a prism—one might even be tempted to add, a "unit"—of comparison, in other words a "mode of reading," is not a metaphysical issue; it has very real implications regarding the ways in which we approach questions such as how one should essay to narrate the history of world literature. In addition to this fundamental differentiation, I also wish to suggest another, more concrete grid that should assist in this effort of localization. This grid is essentially chronotopic and consists of several vectors. One needs to be aware of at least four major reference points: time, space, language and what one could term the plane of self-reflexivity; that is, how literature itself reflects on, and creates images of, "world literature." In what follows, I will address these four points in sections of varying length.

Time

In examining the position of world literature on the axis of time, we are bound to ask the question of whether "world literature" (as attestable textual reality; as prism; or finally as an intellectual discourse) ought to be conceived (a) as an offspring of globalization and transnationalism; or rather (b) as having always been there (but if the latter, again, how do we write its history to account for this: Nikolai Konrad and Franco Moretti could both serve as examples to focus on); or (c)—a third option—as a pre-modern phenomenon that dwindles away with the arrival of the nation state and national cultures (Posnett; Mihaly Babits; to some extent also Antal Szerb). Scenarios (b) and (c) are especially important, as they present an alternative to the prevalent view of world literature being pegged to globalization and transnationalism (and to recent cognate discourses of cosmopolitanism shaped by developments in political philosophy and the social sciences, which tend to see world literature, uncritically, as a facilitator of cosmopolitan attitudes). These two scenarios thus dissent from the dominant Anglo-Saxon discourse of world literature that highlights its dependence on globalization and transnational developments.

Let me dwell on these two dissenting scenarios in closer detail. A key representative of the first one—according to which world literature, rather than being an offspring of globalization, has always existed—is Franco Moretti, whose work is well known and does not need further elucidation here. Moretti, to remind the reader, believes that the eighteenth century was a line of demarcation in the history of world literature, for it was then

that an international book market began to accelerate the travel of texts and norms of innovation. The difference between these two stages—pre- and post-eighteenth century—is so unbridgeable that Moretti reaches for two different methodological toolkits to explore these stages: the first one he hopes to understand by employing evolutionary biology (relying on a key text written as early as the early 1940s); the second one he reflects upon with the help of Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory. (This is not the place to discuss the blind spots in Moretti's otherwise remarkable account of post-eighteenth-century world literature.) But before Moretti, and unbeknownst to him, Nikolai Konrad, a Russian sinologist and Japanologist, equipped with the longue durée perspective which the study of Chinese literature makes more easily available, had attempted an interpretation of world literature based on the same premise—that it is not the product of late (post-)modernity, but a phenomenon that has been around for centuries already. Konrad tried to understand the evolution of world literature by looking at how paradigmatic aesthetic formations travel across the globe (thus binding it together). The Renaissance, for example, which he took to be a socio-cultural situation of renewal through creative reconnection with tradition, had started, according to Konrad, not in Italy but in the China of the eighth century AD, with the so-called fugu movement. (Konrad has been severely criticized for this analogy; the criticism stands, but we need to see nonetheless how his argument works.) After making its appearance in China, the Renaissance "travels" to Iran, and only then does it arrive in Europe. Another important aesthetic formation, Realism, follows the opposite direction of travel. It begins in Europe—it is in Europe that the contradictions of capitalism were ripe enough to be captured and analyzed in the genre of the novel—then crosses over into the Middle East (but there the novel never managed to assert itself as the dominant genre of realist prose; the short story played that role), only to arrive in the Far East as late as the 1920s–1930s.[2] The breathtaking scale of Konrad's vision of the evolution of world literature clearly prepares the ground for Moretti's own exciting exploration of how the European novel travels to the shores of Brazil and to other corners of the world, and how it changes in the process.

The second of the two dissenting scenarios begins with the work of Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, whose book *Comparative Literature* (London, 1886) is the first in the English language to carry this combination of words in its title. Posnett's approach was that of a historical sociologist of literature who sought to align the different stages of literary evolution to the evolving stages in the political organization of society. He

thus distinguished between, amongst others, clan literatures, city-state literatures, world literature (wedded to Empire as a form of political organization and to religions that were evolving towards global, rather than simply regional, phenomena) and national literatures. World literature, as one can see, is here assigned a place in history that identifies it as an earlier stage in the evolution of literature, to be followed by the literatures of the nation states. But the relation of chronological precedence does not carry evaluative connotations: As a sanguine sociologist facing the need to register the evolution of literature as it tracks the evolution of the ways in which the body politic organizes itself, Posnett remained equidistant from the types of literature he describes.

Not so the participants in the fascinating—and until now largely unregistered—Central European debate on world literature that was taking shape in the mid-1930s and the early years of World War II. The stage had been set by Mihály Babits (1883–1941), a Hungarian intellectual of the highest caliber, a poet, prose writer, literary critic, and a central figure in *Nyugat* (West), the liberal magazine that resisted the notion that Hungarian literature is a sanctuary for organic, home-grown uniqueness, safely isolated from the West (in one of his texts, Derrida refers to Babits' best-known religious poem, "The Book of Jonah"). In the mid-1930s, Babits published, in Hungarian, his *History of European Literature* (translated after World War II into German and Italian),[3] in which he proffered his nostalgic reflection on world literature. Like Posnett, Babits saw world literature as but a stage in the evolution of literature; it was tied to cultural and political formations that preceded the nation state. It was Greece and Rome that exemplified for him the space of world literature, sustained by the two great shared languages of European culture, Greek and Latin. Unlike Posnett, however, Babits strikes an elegiac note, lamenting the loss of world literature. With the arrival of the nation state (and especially since its rise across Europe in the nineteenth century), world literature was gradually diminished and, eventually, made impossible by the unrelenting strife and bickering amongst the small states of Europe, each of them championing its own language. Unabashedly Eurocentric, Babits' version of world literature is indicative of later attempts, notably by Ernst Robert Curtius, to reconstruct the unity of European culture by recasting it as a phenomenon of the past that holds lessons for the future.

Antal Szerb (1901–1945), a Hungarian-Jewish intellectual and a representative of a brilliant generation of Central European essayists between the world wars, continues Babits' line whilst also taking his distance from it (Szerb greatly admired Babits and learned from him). Like Babits',

Szerb's own narrative is unapologetically Eurocentric. World literature, Szerb insists, comprises the literatures in Greek and Latin, the Bible, and the vernacular writing in French, Spanish, Italian, English and German.[4] He also follows Babits in his selection of writings on which the stamp of canonicity had been embossed; Szerb's answer to the question of what constitutes canonicity is proto-Gadamerian: The canon is that which tradition names as canonical. Thus the compass of world literature is severely circumscribed: It is the body of writing that has been relevant to Europe (Szerb briefly discusses American literature and the classical literatures of Islam, but not of China and Japan, although they, too, have had an impact on European literature at a later stage) and that has become truly canonical; that is, significant beyond a period or a single (national) culture. At the same time, unlike Babits, Szerb is less inclined to lament the collapse of world literature since the arrival of the nation state and nationalism. While he recognizes the loss of a shared cultural legacy and shared languages, he is more relaxed about the role of national cultures: His discussion of Russian and Scandinavian literatures directs our attention to the national as a gate through which previously unnoticed literatures are drawn into the orbit of world literature.

Methodologically, Szerb is beholden, yet not without reservations, to Spengler's theory of cultural cycles, in which civilizations are subject, ineluctably, to growth and decline (Szerb explicitly acknowledges Spengler's framework early on in the book). For Szerb, this is evident in the rise of two conflicting stylistic (often also ideological) lines in the evolution of European literatures. This principle of antagonistic duality, very much part and parcel of the analytical toolkit of art history and literary studies at the time (to which Bakhtin also pays its dues in his essays on the novel), informs Szerb's discussion of Romanticism, which he places at the center of his history. Romanticism is prepared by the growth of the Gothic and Baroque, and it then exfoliates to give rise to Symbolism, various Modernisms, and a whole plethora of other post-Romantic *écritures.* At the other end of the spectrum one finds Realism, which Szerb takes as evidence that European literatures entered a phase of decline. Realism, just as Romanticism, is only the end product of the evolution of an entire stylistic formation that mirrors a certain outlook and system of values; it comprises Classicism and the Enlightenment, with their allegedly homogenizing and trivializing insistence on the supremacy of the rational, proportionate and decorous. Still, following Lukács' vision of a new synthesis of the epic and the novel, Szerb departs from Spengler by considering the

great examples of rejuvenation of Realism during the inter-war period, in which the epic returns (often with a renewed presence of myth at its heart) to nestle within the novelistic; amongst the best illustrations of this revival he names Thomas Mann, notably championed at the time by both Lukács and Kerényi.

Babits' and Szerb's works on world literature provide an insightful and stimulating exercise in cultural and intellectual history; at the same time, their contribution serves as a cautionary tale about the difficulties we are bound to face when trying to ponder the scope of world literature today and the extent to which it lends itself to historical conceptualization. Most importantly, it is an antidote—more radical in Babits, more qualified in Szerb—to the overwhelming current consensus, according to which world literature is conditioned by the rise of, and embedded in, globalization and transnationalism.

Space

On the other hand, when it comes to space, one would be interested to understand what it means for texts to "circulate": does "circulation" suggest a particular spatial arrangement, and a particular way of thinking about literature that insists on the speed of transmission, on its unhampered progression, and on removing, by implication, the barriers that would halt this circulation? The analogy to capital following the path of least resistance is hard to avoid; in the case of "world literature," this accelerated flow is underpinned by multiple recontextualizations of the text, and not just by its decontextualization, as opponents to the discourse of "world literature" would have it. If so, is "circulation" a specific image of communication that is wedded to particular (liberal) regimes of production and consumption of literature? (The need to think about world literature by considering simultaneously aspects of both its production and its consumption is spelled out as early as 1848 in the famous passage on world literature in Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*.) Or should the metaphor of circulation be read more charitably, as a figure that describes the drawn-out process of the text journeying beyond its environment, with an implicit promise of returning enriched by other cultures' interpretations? This hermeneutic circle does, however, depend on restoring a notion of origin, something that would go against the liberal assumptions of the prevalent Anglo-Saxon discourse of "world literature" by reinstating the importance of national literatures and essentializing particular cultural contexts.

The notion of space can and must be further complicated and dehomogenized by taking into account what I would call the *zonality* of world literature. It is essential to recognize that, historically speaking, world literature was sustained by exchanges in particular zones rather than through a global circulation of texts. The players of world literature would change over time. Before the 1870s, for example, it would make very little sense to talk about world literature with reference to Chinese–European exchanges. The first mention of Goethe in China does not occur until 1878 (and Shakespeare begins to be properly translated only in the early twentieth century), even though Europeans had been appropriating Chinese literature since the sixteenth century; in other words, until the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, there is no proper literary exchange between China and Europe, only a one-sided traffic from China to Europe. But it would, on the other hand, make every sense to talk about world literature as a process of interaction between literatures in particular *zones*, for instance India and the Persian and Arab world, which had for centuries been in close cultural contact. "Zonality" is an idea that goes back to the Slovak comparatist Dionys Durišin, but he still believed—largely because he worked predominantly with European material—that these "zones" correspond to families of literatures based on families of languages (e.g., Slavic literatures, Scandinavian literatures, etc.). It seems to me that this notion needs to be radicalized to enable us to track exchanges between literatures on a global scale, where the zone of interaction is not determined by linguistic similarity. The crucial point, to sum up, is this: Long before globalization, what makes up world literature is not the plethora of seemingly ever-present players (discrete, often nation-based, literatures), whose texts are immersed in a beguilingly panchronic regime of coexistence, easily available through the medium of a global language that facilitates appropriation in translation, but rather the interaction between historically shifting and zonally organized participants, whose outreach to other zones proceeds at a different pace.

Language

We need to ask the unavoidable question about the location of "world literature" vis-à-vis language, which has important consequences for how we interpret the dissipated legacy of modern literary theory. This question appears to be banal at first sight; yet there could not be a more fundamental question when it comes to how we think about literature than the

question of language. Here we need to confront the issue of translation and recognize its legitimacy not just with reference to current debates (between those who champion the beneficial role of translation and those who treasure the idea of untranslatability[5]), but by going to the very origins of modern literary theory—the work of the Russian Formalists. My contention here is that we need to begin to understand the current Anglo-Saxon discourse of world literature, in which the legitimization of reading and analyzing literature in and through translation plays a pivotal role, as an echo of, and a late intervention in, a debate that begins in the early days of classic literary theory. By "classic literary theory" I mean here the paradigm of thinking about literature that rests on the assumption that literature is a specific and unique discourse, whose distinctiveness crystallizes around the abstract quality of "literariness"; this way of thinking about literature begins around World War I and is largely dead by the 1980s,[6] but it does not disappear without leaving behind a dissipated legacy consisting in rehearsing, in various ways, the question of the centrality—or otherwise—of language in how we understand literature. The current debate on "world literature," I submit, is part and parcel of this dissipated legacy of classic literary theory, reenacting the cardinal debate on whether one should think about literature within the horizon of language or beyond that horizon. It is important to insist on this quality of the current Anglo-Saxon discourse of "world literature" as an extension of the earlier debates on language and literariness originating in classic literary theory, not least because, like so many other discourses of liberal persuasion, it too often passes over in silence its own premises, leaving them insufficiently reflected upon, at times even naturalizing them.

As is well known, the Russian Formalists agreed that what constitutes the specificity of literature is literariness. But we tend to forget that they disagreed on what constitutes literariness. Roman Jakobson believed that literariness is lodged in the intricate and fine-grained workings of language (for this reason, I have called him elsewhere a linguistic fundamentalist). To him, only the language of the original matters, as this intricacy cannot be captured in translation. Not by chance does Jakobson spend his entire career, when it comes to literary scholarship, analyzing texts written in verse, basing his work on the language of the original. Shklovsky, Eikhenbaum, to some extent also Tynianov, on the other hand, believed that the effects of literariness are also (and, in a sense, primarily) produced on levels above and beyond language.[7] In a striking difference to Jakobson, they often chose to analyze prose rather than poetry (especially Shklovsky,

whose claim to being a literary theorist is articulated through exclusive attention to the "theory of prose"—as the title of his 1925 book reads) and to do it in translation. It is the level of composition, rather than the micro-level of language, that claimed their attention when trying to explain the effects of literariness. The famous distinction between plot and story, for example, works with undiminishing validity also when we read in translation; we do not need the language of the original to appreciate the transposition of the material and its reorganization through retrospection, retardation and so on. Moreover, they proved that even on the level of style, the language of the original is not the only vehicle of literariness. The parodic aspects of *Don Quixote*, for instance, can be gleaned and grasped also in translation, provided we have some background knowledge of chivalric culture and its conventions. Thus the Russian Formalists' internal debate on what constitutes literariness had the unintended consequence of lending ammunition and justification to those, like Damrosch, who believe in the legitimacy of reading and analyzing literature in translation. The current liberal discourse on world literature, then, is an iteration of the cardinal question of classic literary theory: Should one think about literature within or beyond the horizon of language? This specific iteration recasts this question, while retaining its theoretical momentum. The Russian Formalists were facing the foundational conundrum of literary theory: how to account for literariness with reference to both individual languages and language per se; if their response were to be seminal in terms of *theory*, it had to be a response that addresses both the singularity of language (the language of the original) and its multiplicity (the multiple languages in which a literary text reaches its potential audiences). No claim to theory would lawfully exist unless literariness could be demonstrated to operate across languages, in an act of continuous estrangement from the language of the original. The liberal Anglo-Saxon discourse on world literature, foremost in the work of David Damrosch, has proceeded in the steps of the Formalists by foregrounding the legitimacy of working in and through translation; it has confronted the tension between the singularity and multiplicity of language by concluding that studying literature in the languages of its socialization is more important than studying it in the language of its production, not least because this new priority restricts and undermines the previously sacrosanct monopoly of methodological nationalism in literary studies. (That the languages of creation and socialization can coincide, and the implications flowing from this, especially where this coincidence involves a global language such as English, is something I elaborate on elsewhere.)

Self-Reflexivity

The fourth dimension one must be aware of when seeking to locate "world literature" is the plain of self-reflexivity. One has to emphasize here the fact that literature's self-reflexivity should not be reduced to, and indeed should be differentiated from, intertextuality. Methodologically, the project of intertextuality began life in the mid-1960s by dislodging Bakhtin's dialogism from his ultimately ethical theory of art, in which notions such as voice, dialogue and polyphony had recognizable moral overtones. In the work of Kristeva, they were replaced by a more neutral apparatus that sought to name the phenomenon of one literary text engaging a previous text through allusion, quotation, repetition and so on. In the current Anglo-Saxon discourse of world literature, however, this neutrality is often suspended in favor of celebrating the capacity of literature to weave its own dense intertextual network across time and space, thus demonstrating its own reproductive power qua "world literature." The vector of self-reflexivity, on the other hand, helps us to capture a different set of phenomena: Here, literature still engages earlier texts, but it does so in order to ponder the very idea of world literature, not with triumphalist confidence in its own powers of regeneration, but in the low key of skeptical reflection.

The case study I offer in this chapter involves Chinese culture and its appropriations in the West; it is directly relevant to the question about the location of world literature, in the sense that it locates "world literature" on the level of individual literary texts that examine artistically the idea of world literature and construct images of it. In this case, as I will try to demonstrate, this examination proceeds in a somewhat distrustful and sobering fashion, of which we need to be unrelentingly aware. The text in point is Elias Canetti's 1930s novel *Die Blendung* (translated into English and domesticated in the Anglophone world as *Auto da Fé*).

Canetti's novel has a deeper cultural subtext that has not yet been heeded or appreciated in sufficient measure, despite the fact that the novel has enjoyed enormous critical attention. *Auto da Fé* is a satire on the humanistic ideals of universalism. It is a counter-Enlightenment novel that punishes the hubris of believing in pure reason and boundless humanity. What has remained unnoticed so far is Canetti's subtle mockery of the idea of *Weltliteratur*, a notion coined about half a century before Goethe by Schlözer and Wieland.[8] Especially relevant here is Schlözer's usage. Having returned from St. Petersburg after a long stay there, August Schlözer (1735–1809)[9] was appointed Professor of Russian literature and history at

Göttingen (1769). It was while holding this chair that Schlözer, whose spectacular—from today's perspective—range of scholarly interests mirrored the common standards of his age, published a work on Icelandic literature and history (1773), in which he concluded that medieval Icelandic literature was "just as important for the entire world literature" (*für die gesamte Weltliteratur ebenso wichtig*) as the Anglo-Saxon, Irish, Russian, Byzantine, Hebrew, Arabic and Chinese literatures.[10] It is very important to note here that the idea of "world literature" begins life not amongst writers or narrowly specialized literary scholars, but at the hands of a historian. As a historian, Schlözer wanted to understand the past lives of particular cultures, and he believed that the Icelandic genre of the saga could give scholars an insight into the organization of family relations and inheritance in the Middle Ages. Literature, from his perspective as a historian, had a distinctly utilitarian value as provider of information about alien cultures and past times. It is this utilitarian perspective that enables Schlözer to relax the distinction between "great" and "small" literatures (a gesture that may appear radical even today) by declaring Icelandic literature to be as important as the seven "great" literatures he lists. Schlözer's notion of "world literature" reflects the Enlightenment's exploratory drive and ambition to expand the pool of available cultural evidence. This entailed inclusion of that which had previously been regarded as peripheral or simply non-extant. The revision of the Eurocentric cultural model that was to become the ultimate—not immediate—outcome of this process underpins our modern idea of "world literature," in which the Western canon is but a constituent part of a larger and much more diverse repertoire.[11]

Enlightenment and Romanticism constituted in this regard a continuum, in which the exotic and unfamiliar gradually populated literature and the arts, often confronting the artist with the question of how to portray difference so that it becomes comprehensible, while retaining its irreducibility to Western cultural norms. Only slightly later than Schlözer, Herder's *Volkslieder*, in the first version of 1778–1779, comprised samples of oral poetry from as far afield as Peru; the second edition, *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (1807), extended this curiosity to Madagascar. It is important to realize that the prism through which Schlözer observed the growth of literature was that of the individual peoples of the world: in Schlözer's view, "world literature" is a cumulative, aggregate entity, whose completeness is a matter of expanding the list of nations whose literatures are represented in the catalogue of cultural wealth. An appreciation of cultural difference, in the collective agency of the people/nation, was thus

on the agenda as an extension of the notion of solidarity with an—empirically attestable—wider humanity. But despite all this, Schlözer was less concerned with promoting a dialogue between these literatures, and their dynamic interaction hardly claimed his research ambitions.

Canetti's *Auto da Fé* cannot be grasped outside this framework of a boundless humanity that offers its cultural gifts to the discerning and appreciative European. Not by accident is Peter Kien, the main character in the novel, a sinologist, Chinese literature having been recognized as a constituent part of "world literature" by both Schlözer and Goethe, who tells Eckermann of his delight in reading a Chinese novel. As we know, Goethe was actually reading a second-rate Chinese novel (dropping the evaluative distinction between masterpieces and "ordinary" works of literature will prove crucial to the endurance of the current liberal discourse of "world literature") and he was doing so not in German, but in a French translation (the ultimate cosmopolitan experience that is meant to create a space of freedom from the intrusive national pictures of the world conveyed by the respective national languages—Chinese or German—and to minimize the lure of self-identification with a national culture).

"Keine menschliche Literatur war ihm fremd" ("No branch of human literature was unfamiliar to him," 15)[12]: This is how Kien is introduced to the reader early on, with an added remark about his knowledge also of Sanskrit (no doubt a jibe at the Romantic preoccupation with ancient India), Japanese and the Western European languages. Kien, in other words, is a philologist par excellence, a model scholar of "world literature" in its enticing totality. The fact that he carries "another," invisible library in his head is a confirmation of his internalization of culture. He had not succumbed to the recent fads of superficially praising Japanese and Chinese art, which had been so much a part of European middle-class demeanor since the late nineteenth century; instead, he walks around as a veritable encyclopedia of Chinese and other Eastern cultures, to which he relates with genuine understanding and informed restraint.

And yet Kien himself gives the lie to this humanistic embrace of otherness. "Literature" to him is the sum total of dead manuscripts and old inscriptions rather than the living word of, say, a novel. For Kien, novels furnish pleasure at a prohibitive cost; they "crack open" the otherwise monolithic personalities of their readers by enticing them into sympathizing with characters who hold dear values that may well differ from their own. This turns the novel into a rather dangerous genre, an instrument of unhinging and dislocating the reader from a space of moral certitude into

a zone of unfamiliarity, dizziness and perilous self-reliance. For that reason, just as in Plato's Republic, Kien believes that literature—if exemplified by the novel, as is the case in modernity—should be "prohibited by the state" (37). Canetti thus ultimately parodies the humanistic idea of a cosmopolitan culture—and the Enlightenment notion of "world literature," as one of its indispensable manifestations.

To appreciate the depth and subtlety of *Auto da Fé*, we must see it in the context of Canetti's renewal of, and challenge to, the Central European Jewish literary patrimony, especially the work of Kafka. Canetti has often acknowledged his fascination with Kafka (in his essayistic work and also in his little book of 1969, *Der andere Prozess*, translated into English as *Kafka's Other Trial: The Letters to Felice*, 1974), but nowhere so vividly as in his novel. It is with reference to Kafka that I suggest we could attain a more nuanced understanding of Canetti's choice to cast Peter Kien as a sinologist. The mockery of the idea of "world literature" as an instrument of cosmopolitanism is an important pointer, but there appears to be more behind Canetti's decision. In Chinese philosophy (a lifelong fascination for Canetti), he discovered an apposite parallel to Kafka's art of "transformation" into "something small" (*Kafka's Other Trial*, 89), of disappearance into self-imposed insignificance and humility as resistance to, or evasion of, power. In this sense Kafka, Canetti asserted unhesitatingly, was "the only writer of the Western world who is essentially Chinese" (*Kafka's Other Trial*, 94). Canetti invoked his conversations in London with Arthur Waley, the self-taught Orientalist and translator of *Monkey*, of Chinese poetry and the Confucian classics, as confirmation of his opinion. But the killer proof seems to have come from a passage in a postcard Kafka had sent to Felice from Marienbad in which he avowed "indeed I am a Chinese" (quoted in *Kafka's Other Trial*, 97), with all the ramifications of such a statement that Canetti then chose to read into Kafka's brief text. In Canetti's own words, "[s]ilence and emptiness [...] receptivity of everything animate and inanimate—these are reminiscent of Taoism and of a Chinese landscape" (*Kafka's Other Trial*, 98).

Chinese philosophy and culture in Canetti's novel should not be taken at face value: Canetti deliberately skewed, misread and manipulated his sources,[13] but the end result was a caricatured emblem of cultural harmony and a deliberately debased ideal of "world literature" and cosmopolitanism, emptied, as we have seen, of its core notion of diversity and difference. Part and parcel of this parodying of "world literature" is the very motif of the "battle of the books," a topos in European literatures that goes back to

Cervantes and Swift.[14] Revealingly, in order to enhance their endurance in the new "war" regime, Kien rearranges his books with their spines turned to the wall, introducing anonymity and obliterating any trace of difference. The novel, then, is a celebration not of the uniqueness of singular cultures, nor indeed of their supposed interaction; rather, it is a reconfirmation of skepticism vis-à-vis the very possibility of cultural dialogue.

I have briefly analyzed Canetti's novel not just in order to highlight his skepticism (something very healthy to do, it seems to me), but in order to draw attention to this, in my view, extremely important meta-level of reflection on world literature, in which literature itself ponders the idea of world literature—always from a specific, and thus limited, cultural and ideological perspective.

References

1. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton, 2003).
2. Konrad's explorations of world literature can be found in his collection of articles *Zapad i Vostok: Stat'i* (Moscow, 1966); there is an abridged, and linguistically rather inadequate and unreliable, English translation (*West-East: Inseparable Twain*, Moscow, 1967).
3. My brief analysis is based on the German translation: Michael Babits, *Geschichte der europäischen Literatur* (Vienna, 1949).
4. Throughout this portion of the text, I am referring to the German translation of Szerb's 1941 book: Antal Szerb, *Geschichte der Weltliteratur* (Basel, 2016).
5. On the latter position, see, above all, Emily Apter's book *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London, 2013).
6. On this, see Galin Tihanov, "Why Did Modern Literary Theory Originate in Central and Eastern Europe? (And Why Is It Now Dead?)", *Common Knowledge*, 2004, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 61–81 [Polish translation: "Dlaczego nowoczesna teoria literatury narodziła się w Europie Środkowej i Wschodnej? (I dlaczego dziś jest martwa?)", *Teksty drugie*, 2007, No. 4, pp. 131–51 (trans. Marcin Adamiak); Hungarian translation: "Vajon a modern irodalomelmélet miért Közép- és Kelet-Európából ered? És ma miért halott?", *2000*, 2012, Vol. 24, Nos. 1–2, pp. 76–91 (trans. Tamás Scheibner)].
7. For more on this, see in Galin Tihanov, "Pamiat' teorii: o nasledii russkogo formalizma", in *Russkaia intellektual'naia revoliutsiia 1910–1930-kh godov*, ed. S. Zenkin and E. Shumilova (Moscow, 2016), 58–63.
8. On this, see Galin Tihanov, "Cosmopolitanism in the Discursive Landscape of Modernity: Two Enlightenment Articulations," in *Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism*, ed. David Adams and Galin Tihanov (London, 2011), 133–152, esp. 142–143.

9. On Schlözer's life and career, see most recently Martin Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa. Der Historiker, Statistiker und Publizist August Ludwig (v.) Schlözer (1735—1809)* (Münster, 2003).
10. The quote is from Wolfgang Schamoni, "'Weltliteratur'—zuerst 1773 bei August Ludwig Schlözer," *Arcadia* 43, no. 2 (2008): 288–98, here 289; it was first adduced in Sigmund vom Lempicki, *Geschichte der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts* (1920; Göttingen, 1968), 418.
11. On current debates around the meaning of "world literature," see especially David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, 2003); John Pizer, *The Idea of World Literature* (Baton Rouge, 2006); Dieter Lamping, *Die Idee der Weltliteratur: Ein Konzept Goethes und seine Karriere* (Stuttgart, 2010); and Franco Moretti's influential articles collected in his *Distant Reading* (London, 2013). See also Elke Sturm-Trigonakis, *Global Playing in der Literatur: Ein Versuch über die neue Weltliteratur* (Würzburg, 2007); Alfons K. Knauth, "Weltliteratur: Von der Mehrsprachigkeit zur Mischsprachigkeit," in *Literatur und Vielsprachigkeit*, ed. Monika Schmitz-Emans (Heidelberg, 2004), 81–110; and Ottmar Ette, *Literature on the Move* (Amsterdam, 2003) (the German original was published in 2001 under the title *Literatur in Bewegung: Raum und Dynamik grenzüberschreitenden Schreibens in Europa und Amerika*). For a stimulating account that still foregrounds a residually Eurocentric model, see Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2004) (French ed., 1999). For a recent critique of "world literature," see Emily Apter, *Against World Literature* (London, 2013). For an intervention that builds on Damrosch, Moretti, Casanova and others, but also attempts to go further, see Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (London, 2015); see also Zhang Longxi, *From Comparison to World Literature* (Albany, NY, 2015).
12. Here and henceforth the English text of the novel follows the standard translation, with indication of the relevant page number(s).
13. See Chunjie Zhang, "Social Disintegration and Chinese Culture: The Reception of China in *Die Blendung*," in *The Worlds of Elias Canetti: Centenary Essays*, ed. William Colling Donahue and Julian Price (Newcastle, 2007), 127–49, here 148–49. Further on China in Canetti's novel, see Alexander Košenina, "'Buchstabenschnüffeleien' eines Sinologen: China-Motive in Elias Canettis Gelehrtensatire *Die Blendung*," Orbis Litterarum 53 (1998): 231–51 (with a good bibliography of earlier scholarship).
14. On this, see Achim Hölter, *Die Bücherschlacht. Ein satirisches Konzept in der europäischen Literatur* (Bielefeld, 1995).



CHAPTER 4

Frames for World Literature

David Damrosch

"World literature" was first formulated as a term in Germany in the late eighteenth century, and the concept was taken up by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and then popularized through the memoir by his disciple Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens* (Conversations with Goethe in the Final Years of His Life). For Goethe, "Weltliteratur" referred to the circulation of important works in an international marketplace, and in 1827 he predicted to Eckermann that world literature would gradually come to replace national literatures altogether:

> "I am more and more convinced," he continued, "that poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times in hundreds and hundreds of men. One makes it a little better than another, and swims on the surface a little longer than another—that is all. [...] I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations and advise everyone to do the same. National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World-literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach."[1]

D. Damrosch (✉)
Department of Comparative Literature, Harvard University,
Cambridge, MA, USA
e-mail: ddamrosc@fas.harvard.edu

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_4

Though the focus of his interests was primarily European, Goethe already had a global perspective: his conversation with Eckermann was prompted by their discussion of a Chinese novel he was reading at the time, and he had been studying Persian in order to better understand the great poet Hafiz.

Goethe's evocation of the Chinese novel already raises the twin questions of the possibilities and the perils of assessing works from afar. Goethe was probably reading a poor English translation of a minor Ming Dynasty romance, *Haoqiu zhuan* (A Fortunate Union), which Goethe took as epitomizing the elegance and orderliness of classical Chinese culture. He had no way to know that vernacular fiction held a fairly low place in the Chinese hierarchy of genres, and that even within vernacular fiction, this particular romance was by no means one of the most highly regarded. One of the challenges of world literature studies today is to do a better job of understanding works in their home context, even as they assume a new life abroad in new literary and cultural contexts in which they may have very different meanings and effects. This chapter will seek to set out the principal ways in which world literature is best understood, looking both at the challenges and the new opportunities for scholarship and pedagogy offered by a focus on world literature today.

Spurred by the rapid acceleration of globalization, in recent years scholars in many parts of the world have taken a new interest in Goethe's concept. Yet no single definition of world literature has secured general agreement, nor is there any consensus on whether a globalized world literature is even a development to be welcomed as Goethe expected. It is not surprising that different definitions exist, for world literature has many facets, and it takes very different forms in different places and in different uses even within a single culture. World literature operates in a multidimensional space, with partially overlapping but distinct canons of world literature in different countries and in different eras even within one country. And once we look beyond a single culture and era, the term "literature" itself has to be defined in varied ways: how we define "world literature" has as much to do with how we—or a given culture at a given time—may define "literature" as well as "world."

World Literature and Translation

Common to most definitions of world literature is a recognition that it is possible to delineate the concept of world literature as something more specific than the full set of all the world's literatures, for which the

unmodified term “literature” already suffices. If we consider world literature as including works that achieve an effective life outside their country of origin, we have already begun to give definite boundaries to the concept. Most literary works do not in fact find readers beyond their home country, and so the canon of world literature is a fairly selective canon even in expansive times such as the present. The selectivity of the corpus of world literature is greatly heightened by the fact that some countries contribute more works to the corpus of world literature than do most other countries, a fact that introduces important issues of political and economic power, worldly matters that must be taken into consideration in any discussion of world literature today. Until recently, students of comparative literature generally took such imbalances for granted. Though some early comparatists such as the Transylvanian Hugo Meltzl advocated a global perspective, more common was a great-power perspective centered on Western Europe. Thus the Danish literary historian Georg Brandes confined himself to discussing the literatures of England, France, and Germany, with no mention of the literature of his own country, in his *Litteratur des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts in ihren Hauptströmungen*.[2]

Some works can circulate broadly in the original language—Vergil was widely read in Latin in Europe for many centuries, and writers in global languages such as English or Spanish can be read untranslated in many countries. Yet even the writers in global languages are regularly translated into many other languages when they achieve a substantial presence beyond their country of origin: the American novelist Paul Auster is read in more than 30 languages today, and may well sell more copies in translation than in English. This is all the more true of a writer in a less commonly spoken language: Orhan Pamuk has been translated into nearly 60 languages, and his foreign sales vastly outnumber his sales in Turkey. A defining feature of world literature, then, is that it consists of works that thrive in translation.

There are always serious stylistic losses when a work is translated, and yet there can be offsetting gains as well, not only in terms of the size of the audience but also in terms of understanding. A work that profoundly challenges home-country values may find its best readers abroad: the Book of Job could only be read in a relatively cautious manner by orthodox readers in the classical Hebrew tradition, and the *Thousand and One Nights* was long regarded in the Arab world as sub-literary, not worth serious attention at all. Even a work that has a classic status at home gains new dimensions when it travels abroad: seen together with Sophocles, Kalidasa, and

Brecht, Shakespeare looks different than when he is viewed only in the company of compatriots like Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson. Many works, however, do not take on new meaning and new stature when read abroad, either because their language simply is not translatable without crippling losses, or because their frame of reference is so exclusively local that they have little resonance abroad. Such works may be treasured and influential within their home tradition but never become works of world literature in any effective sense; they are read abroad, if at all, only by specialists in their culture and language of origin.

Increasing interest is being taken today in the challenges of literary works whose language resists ready translation, an "untranslatability" that often spurs particularly adventurous attempts at translation, such as the recent Chinese translation by Dai Congren of James Joyce's notoriously untranslatable *Finnegans Wake*, which sold a remarkable 8000 copies in its first month.[3] This was as much a scholarly endeavor as a literary one; while her translation was still in progress, Professor Dai discussed its challenges in an essay for the *James Joyce Quarterly*.[4] In her recent book *Against World Literature*, subtitled *On the Politics of Untranslatability*, the American comparatist Emily Apter has emphasized the importance of giving renewed attention not only to the linguistic challenges of translation, but equally to the uneven political landscape of cross-cultural translation.[5] A good example of scholarship that discusses such challenges in depth is *A Common Strangeness*, by the New Zealander Jacob Edmond, which compares the strategies used by contemporary Chinese, Russian, and American poets to resist commodification and any too easy, superficial understanding.[6]

Europe and the Wider World

Throughout the twentieth century, most comparative studies in Europe and North America focused on the literatures of Western Europe and North America, perhaps extending as far east as Russia, but usually skipping over Eastern Europe in the process. The rest of the world was rarely discussed, much less included in full partnership with studies of Western literature. As the Japanese comparatist Sukehiro Hirakawa has written of his education in Tokyo in the 1950s:

> It is true that great scholars such as Curtius, Auerbach and Wellek wrote their monumental scholarly works in order to overcome nationalism. But to outsiders like me, Western Comparative Literature scholarship seemed to be an

> expression of a new form of nationalism – the Western nationalism, if I may use such an expression. It seemed to us an exclusive club of Europeans and Americans. It was a sort of Greater West European Co-Prosperity Sphere.[7]

Hirakawa's ironic analogy of postwar comparative literature to Japan's prewar economic imperialism underscores the discipline's general bias in the 1950s and 1960s, even though many comparatists thought of themselves as promoting a literary world without borders, a kind of cultural analog to the United Nations. Idealistic though the Euro-American vision of world literature certainly was, Hirakawa and his colleagues in Tokyo were well aware that the field was dominated by a literary Security Council of quite limited membership, not coincidentally largely coinciding with the membership of the actual United Nations Security Council. In 1960 Werner Friederich, founder of the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, noted that "world literature" rarely encompassed very much of the world at all:

> Apart from the fact that such a presumptuous term makes for shallowness and partisanship which should not be tolerated in a good university, it is simply bad public relations to use this term and to offend more than half of humanity. […] Sometimes, in flippant moments, I think we should call our programs NATO Literatures – yet even that would be extravagant, for we do not usually deal with more than one fourth of the 15 NATO-Nations.[8]

Yet Friederich didn't intend to broaden out the courses beyond their European focus; instead, he recommended dropping the term "world literature" altogether.

The major-power focus continued to dominate well after the 1950s. In 1971 the German comparatist Horst Rüdiger offered a strong defense of a major-power comparatism, now by a negative analogy to the United Nations: comparative literature, he wrote, must not be seen as "a U. N. General Assembly, in which the voices of the great powers count no more than those of the political provinces. It is the *liber aureus* of aesthetically successful and historically effective works in all languages. Only this delimitation […] makes meaningful comparative work possible."[9] In principle, Rüdiger's definition can encompass great books from any point on the globe, yet it is suggestive that in his United Nations analogy he doesn't even allow that the smaller powers are nations at all, but merely "political provinces." In practice, Rüdiger focuses on writers from the great-power

subset of what Friederich would term "NATO-literature." In his essay, Rüdiger mentions twenty-five writers by name: two classical writers (Homer, Horace), nine Germans, eight French writers, and one writer each from England, the United States, and modern Italy. He includes no Asian, African, or Latin American writers, nor any from the smaller European countries.

Outside Europe and North America too, world literature was often understood primarily as comprised of masterpieces of Western European literature, which dominated anthologies produced both in China and in Japan over the course of the twentieth century. In China, programs in world literature have typically been located in foreign literature departments, mostly concerned with Russian and the principal Western European languages and literatures. Comparative literature programs have typically been located within Chinese departments, usually focusing on relations between Chinese literature and, again, Western Europe, Russia, or America, as well as Japanese and occasionally Korean literature. Yet, whether based in comparative literature or in world literature, it has been a rare scholar in China who would study Sanskrit or Bengali or Vietnamese or Indonesian or Swahili or Arabic, and works translated from those languages were rarely included in courses.

In the United States, the European great-power emphasis began to give way to a global focus in the mid-1990s, and an increasing number of writers are being made available even in anthologies designed for introductory courses. In the United States, the *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* was content in its first edition of 1956 to survey the world through a total of only 73 authors, not one of whom was a woman, and all of whom were writers in "the Western Tradition" stretching from ancient Athens and Jerusalem to modern Europe and North America. The numbers of included authors gradually expanded, and in the third edition of 1976 the editors finally found room for two pages of writing by a woman, Sappho, but the European and North American focus persisted into the early 1990s, in the Norton as in most other "world" literature anthologies and the courses they served. The Chinese-American comparatist Rey Chow was rightly concerned at the time that the early efforts to broaden the spectrum of world literature weren't so much dismantling the great-power canon as extending its sway by admitting a few new great powers into the alliance. As she wrote in 1995:

> The problem does not go away if we simply substitute India, China and Japan for England, France, and Germany. […] In such instances, the concept of literature is strictly subordinated to a social Darwinian understanding of the nation: "masterpieces" correspond to "master" nations and "master" cultures. With India, China, and Japan being held as representative of Asia, cultures of lesser prominence in Western reception such as Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Tibet, and others simply fall by the wayside – as marginalized "others" to the "other" that is the "great" Asian civilizations.[10]

To a very real extent, the expansion of our understanding of world literature has improved this situation during the past 20 years. Today the major American anthologies published by Longman, Bedford, and Norton itself present as many as 500 authors from dozens of countries, including works originally written in Akkadian, Chinese, Japanese, Kikuyu, Korean, Nahuatl, Quechua, Swahili, Vietnamese, Zulu, and many other languages. Even within the boundaries of Europe alone, *Don Quixote* now shares the stage with Arabic and Hebrew writing from medieval Andalusia, while Welsh laments, Norse sagas, and the poems of the Polish Nobel Prize winner Wisława Szymborska further expand the linguistic boundaries of European world literature.

In China, a similar range can be found in a 10-volume world literature anthology in Chinese that I have co-edited together with my Tsinghua colleague Chen Yongguo, though this anthology still has a substantial proportion of European works, as Europe continues to hold pride of place in most Chinese courses in world literature.[11] A full opening out to the variety of the world's literary production is only just beginning, both in Asia and in America and elsewhere. This is the theme of the opening essay for a new Korean journal, *Chigujŏk segye munhak* (Global World Literature), published since 2012 under the editorship of Kim Jae-yong, professor of modern Korean and world literature at Wonkwang University in Iksan, South Korea. In his programmatic essay, "From Eurocentric World Literature to Global World Literature," Professor Kim notes that in Asia itself, Eurocentrism dominated the study of non-East Asian literatures, and he emphasizes the importance that his journal places on giving equal representation to each region of the world:

> There had been academic conferences for Asian and African literature prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, but because of the tensions between the Soviet Union and China, these conferences were embroiled in internal con-

> flict, to the extent that they set up separate administrative offices in Egypt and Ceylon. These organizations existed in name only, and they disappeared as soon as the Soviet Union fell. […] Thinking that a new collaborative framework was needed, within which Asian, African, and Latin American literature could be discussed together, an Asian, African, and Latin American literature forum was organized in Korea. At this forum, writers who had come from non-western regions unanimously called for the creation of a journal that would go beyond Euro-American-centrism. However, they realized that if the journal were to handle only non-western literature, the exclusion of Euro-American literature would make the prospect of a truly global world literature rather difficult. So they decided to create a journal that would put western and non-western literatures together. As a result, the geographies handled by this journal span the five regions of Asia, Euro-America, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America.[12]

This quotation comes from an English version of Kim's essay, prepared for the inaugural issue of the new *Journal of World Literature* published in Amsterdam by Brill, which embodies a similar attempt to move beyond the Euro-American-centrism of previous comparative and world literature studies. The journal's founding managing editors were Iranians working in Europe, with a board of four general editors from Belgium, China, Turkey, and the United States, and an advisory board from a total of eighteen countries. Similar in their global perspective, the two journals differ notably in their language. All of the articles in the Korean journal are written in Korean, thereby sharpening the journal's focus as an intervention within Korean culture, while the Brill journal uses English as a convenient lingua franca to reach readers around the world. Taken together, these two approaches exemplify the dual nature of world literature, as at once a global phenomenon and also a local one, always experienced by individual readers within their particular national context—its educational system, its network of publication and translation, its literary norms and cultural frameworks.

Classics, Masterpieces, and Windows on the World

Whether we consider world literature in its global circulation or in a particular local reception, the question arises as to what kinds of works really qualify as "world literature." The more restricted boundaries of the older world literature did have the virtue of allowing—or enforcing—a degree of built-in coherence in terms of literary history and culture. As the focus of world literature broadens, it becomes newly important to define just

what it is we are reading when we read a work of world literature. From Goethe's time onward, definitions of world literature have oscillated among three basic paradigms: as *classics*, as *masterpieces*, and as *windows on the world*. I have discussed these definitions more fully in my book *What Is World Literature?*,[13] but will outline them here. These alternative conceptions are implied in such titles as the following: *The Harvard Classics* (1910), *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (1956), and *The HarperCollins World Reader* (1994). The dates of these three collections correspond to a gradual shift of emphasis, but the three conceptions are not mutually exclusive, and ideas of the classic and the masterpiece continue to figure in many courses and collections. All three definitions still need to be taken into account today.

The idea of the literary classic has a long and distinguished history in China, as Zhang Longxi emphasizes in an essay in the *Journal of World Literature*:

> as early as the fourth century B. C. E., the word *jing* was already used to designate a limited number of ancient books that were put in a special category as the most important texts for education. […] In my view, it should be the task of literary scholars everywhere to introduce and present the canonical works they know best to the world beyond the culture of their origin. I say canonical works because these are by definition the best and most exemplary works of different literary traditions, works that have stood the test of time and proven to be valuable for generations of readers under very different social and cultural conditions.[14]

As Frank Kermode has argued in *The Classic*, classics are foundational works for their culture, most often of imperial or aristocratic origin, often ancient and certainly influential over time.[15] As enshrined academically in departments of Classics, the term was used to refer to Greek and Latin literature *tout court*. In principle, the study of Classics could encompass virtually any author active in those ancient cultures, whether major authors such as Sophocles and Vergil or figures of far less exalted literary status, such as the Roman playwright Livius Andronicus, or figures such as Statius who are of interest only to specialists today.

Whereas collections such as the *Loeb Classical Library* never hesitated to make room for minor as well as major authors, aesthetic criteria come to the fore in conceptions of world literature as the corpus of the world's masterpieces. To a practicing author such as Goethe, an emphasis on world masterpieces had the considerable advantage that his best works could

take their place in this pantheon during his own lifetime, rather than only long after his death. In contrast to the vertical orientation of the classical tradition, extending upward in time from the deep past, the category of "the masterpiece" works just as well on a contemporary, horizontal plane. The world masterpiece can be recognized almost as soon as it is published to glowing reviews and begins to circulate in translation. Far from needing to live in an ancient cultural capital such as imperial Xi'an or Rome, or in contemporary Beijing or New York, the writer of a masterpiece can come from a small country (such as Goethe's duchy of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach in a not-yet-unified Germany) and can personally stem from quite modest origins: Johann Wolfgang Goethe was granted the noble "von" by his Duke only at age 33.

The emphasis on masterpieces has advantages for the teacher as well as for the writer, since it is a highly selective category. This frees an instructor to take up only a few works in a course, with no need to set the major authors within a frame of the much larger body of less transcendent writing around them. Where *The Harvard Classics* ran to fifty volumes, the Norton *World Masterpieces* could make do with two, conveniently arranged for use in a two-semester survey course. The masterpiece thus offers a kind of inverse economy of scale: the greater the works, the fewer of them you really need to teach. A specialized course in Dante as a late medieval Italian writer might logically entail assigning dozens of associated writers, from the theologians Thomas Aquinas and Bernard of Clairvaux to the poets Brunetto Latini and Bertran de Born—all of whom appear as characters in the *Divine Comedy*—but a masterworks course can leap directly from peak experience to peak experience: from the *Aeneid* to the *Divine Comedy* and on to *Paradise Lost* and *Faust*. Similarly, in China a course in the New Culture movement will usually include a range of significant figures who may not have themselves been major writers, whereas for my course at Harvard in masterpieces of world literature, Lu Xun and Eileen Chang together serve as the readings for our week on modern Chinese literature, seen in relation to such writers as Orhan Pamuk, Salman Rushdie, and Jhumpa Lahiri, rather than in the company of their contemporaries in Shanghai and Beijing.

Such a course in masterpieces of world literature can emphasize the gradual unfolding of a classical tradition, but the presentation can equally take the form of a multi-polar "great conversation" among works grouped in an ideal simultaneity. This conversation can be held among works that are linked by genre or theme, with little reference to historical influence or

direct literary relations. The conversation may be inscribed within the texts themselves, in references to predecessors or to contemporary rivals, but it can equally be constructed at will by the instructor, as when a course pairs the Confucian Book of Songs with the biblical Song of Songs, works whose commentary traditions Zhang Longxi has insightfully compared in his book *Allegoresis: Reading Canonical Literature East and West*.[16]

Since the mid-1990s, the classical and masterpiece approaches have increasingly been supplemented by an emphasis on a view of world literature as a set of windows on the world. Reacting to the tendency of earlier models to focus largely or even exclusively on works by a few privileged (usually white and male) authors from a handful of Western countries, many comparatists have broadened their focus to include intriguing conjunctions of compelling works of many origins. These works may be discussed and taught regardless of whether they can be described as "masterpieces"—or at least as what Western readers might readily recognize as masterpieces. Thus the *HarperCollins World Reader*, an American anthology published in 1985, included substantial sections on African and Native American oral works, which aren't even literature at all in the etymological sense of works "written in letters." In her preface to the collection, general editor Mary Ann Caws emphasized that the anthology had been created from "a global perspective" and with the selections and arrangement "determined by their own cultural context rather than by Western or Eurocentric preconceptions." Not only do these writers represent different cultural circumstances and artistic norms, they need not be dominant figures even within their home culture. The collection showcases "marginal as well as mainstream voices in literature, particularly the inclusion of women's voices."[17]

Distinct in theory, the three definitions of "world literature" are often combined in practice. Goethe, indeed, held all three views simultaneously, cherishing the Greek and Latin classics he read in the original, promoting the modern masterpieces he and his friend Schiller were composing, and enjoying Chinese novels and Persian poetry as windows on very different worlds of culture and aesthetic expression. World literature surveys have long combined all three approaches, as in the case of Columbia University's venerable great books course, Literature Humanities, which has a Classics-based fall semester giving a window onto Greco-Roman literary culture, followed by a spring semester of European masterworks. Conversely, the new global anthologies include works far beyond the purview of traditional Western-based courses, but they still typically give most of their

pages to works long recognized as masterpieces within their culture of origin. *The Tale of Genji* and *Journey to the West* can't be read in the same way as *Don Quixote*, but they are equally masterworks, and Murasaki, Wu Cheng'en, and Cervantes offer windows on their respective worlds of Heian Japan, Ming Dynasty China, and early modern Spain.

The idea of literature as a window on the world can be extended within national traditions themselves, to those works that seek to offer their readers a vision of the world beyond their borders. This theme is already prominent in Homer's *Odyssey*, with its hero's adventures around the Mediterranean, and in *Journey to the West*, in which Tripitaka and his stalwart companions venture to India in search of Buddhist sutras—a tale built on a key moment in the history of world literary transmission, if we include religious writings within a broad definition of "literature." The worlds of Homer and Wu Cheng'en are highly fanciful, but they already represent early attempts to open out the world beyond its ordinary boundaries.

World, Region, Nation

The interplay of national, regional, and global contexts has been present as long as the idea of *Weltliteratur* itself. If contemporary globalization gives a new prominence to sweeping patterns of distribution and reception, these new planetary movements continue to co-exist along with vital national and regional cultures and markets. And during most of the five millennia of literary production, literature circulated within regional "worlds" rather than around the globe at large. Premodern and early modern literatures offer important opportunities for the study of the varied ways in which literature over the centuries reached a world beyond its writers' borders, whether in traveling around the ancient Mediterranean world or through the East Asian Sinosphere. Zhang Longxi's *Allegoresis*, previously mentioned, was a pathbreaking case of cross-cultural comparison not just of two texts but of two literary cultures.[18] More recently, the American scholar Wiebke Denecke has published a far-reaching comparative study under the title *Classical World Literatures: Sino-Japanese and Greco-Roman Comparisons*. Fluent in both Chinese and Japanese, as well as trained in classical Greek and Latin, Denecke argues for work attuned to "asymmetries of the comparison of historically unrelated cultures," in an approach that "turns asymmetry and incommensurability into a key heuristic device."[19] Thus she sets aside the old question of why China "lacked" an epic tradition, instead looking at the ways in which regulated

verse functioned within China's literary system comparably to the role of epic in Greece. In her book overall, she explores the varied ways in which Japanese writers related to the "reference culture" of China, both acknowledging their indebtedness and also making claims for the value of their own work, a process she compares in illuminating ways to Roman writers' complex relations to their own reference culture of Greece.

Both premodern and modern literatures can very profitably be studied in regional contexts, but increasing attention is also being paid today to the idea of world literature as a global phenomenon. In *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Gayatri Spivak called for a "planetary" perspective that would definitively supplant the Eurocentrism of older comparatist studies.[20] What this perspective might mean in practice can be illustrated by the work of Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova. In a pair of essays entitled "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000, 2003), now collected in his book *Distant Reading* (2014), Moretti has proposed to study world literature through the dual lenses of Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory and of Darwinian evolutionary theory.[21] Arguing that the world's literature forms a system that is "*one*, and *unequal*," Moretti proposes a model that would study the ebbs and flows of genres across regions and around the globe. In Moretti's view, the European novel can be mapped as an invasive species, spreading around the world in the wake of colonial and neocolonial political and economic developments, putting down roots in cultures that previously had little history of extended prose fiction, and variously suppressing traditional genres and inspiring new creativity, usually after an initial period of uncertain, derivative composition.

Moretti's system operates at a high level of generality, as new genres and new media such as film sweep their way around the world, almost impersonally carried along in the wake of the movements of global capital. He goes so far as to claim that literary history should eschew close reading in favor of tracing large-scale patterns discernible through "distant reading" of publication data and sales figures. Moretti's model can perfectly well be combined, though, with close reading of exemplary texts, and close study of literary works is surely central in any full understanding of the ways in which the norms of the realist novel, or the film noir, are adapted and reinvented in new cultural contexts.

If the pure form of Moretti's theory is relatively abstract, matters get much more concrete and personal in Pascale Casanova's *La République mondiale des lettres* (1999), which sees writers as competing for attention and prestige in an increasingly global market. Like Moretti, Casanova

emphasizes the political and cultural inequalities of her "world republic of letters," in which some nations are favored contenders, and of which Paris was long a crucial node of circulation and recognition.[22] Observers outside France are unlikely to agree that Paris has ever been the sole capital of the republic of letters; certainly London, Berlin, Barcelona, St. Petersburg, New York, Shanghai, and Beijing among other cities have been centers of major publishing industries and have had major impact on the success of works abroad. Casanova's model is perhaps best seen not as a global model, but instead as a regional one, well attuned to the central role of Paris—"capital of the nineteenth century," in Walter Benjamin's phrase—within Western Europe and for its colonies and now former colonies.

It is not altogether surprising that a French writer should see world literature from a French-inflected perspective. For the nation remains a key locus of the creation and circulation of world literature, as well as of the training of the people who discuss literature. World literature exists in a dialectical relation to the national culture within which any given reader is situated—both extending the possibility of what one knows from one's home tradition and yet also profoundly shaped by it as well. During the past 50 years, the balance has certainly shifted outward toward inclusion of much more of the world, but it remains the case that world literature will take a different shape in each region and country where it is realized in the concrete form of syllabi, available translations, and languages known by a given readership.

World literature has had a particularly intimate connection to national traditions when it has been used as a prime tool in the building of a national literature—and in building a nation by means of its literature, as was notably the case in China. As Jing Tsu has discussed in "Getting Ideas about World Literature in China," the bilingual writer Chen Jitong evoked the idea of 世界的文学 (world literature) as early as 1898, emphasizing the importance of translation of foreign works in order to provide a basis for modernizing Chinese literature. As Chen wrote, "Since we want to participate in world literature, our first step must be to do away with the barriers so as to preempt misunderstandings. To do this, we must advocate for translation on a grand scale. Not only should we bring others' masterworks into our language but our own works of merit must also be translated en masse into theirs."[23] An extensive body of translation was produced during the final decades of the Qing Dynasty, and translations of world literature assumed greater importance with the New Culture movement of the May Fourth period. Such figures as Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren were

prolific translators and sought to revolutionize Chinese literature through selective adaptation of foreign modes of writing, notably in the use of prose fiction and free verse.

Literary scholarship today is only just beginning to catch up with the longstanding circulation of art and literature around the world. One way for us to carry out a more global comparative study, in fact, will be to look more fully at the presence of the wider world within our own home locales. The nationalism of the national literary traditions was never as watertight as nationalistic literary histories have often supposed. Our departments of modern literature arose, after all, during the heyday of nationalism, and even now they often perpetuate the nineteenth-century assumption that the essence of a nation is carried by its national language, embodied in its highest form by the masterpieces of its national literature. The presence of minority or foreign languages within the national cultural space has often been neglected, studied only minimally if at all. Until recently, American poets who wrote in Spanish or in Yiddish were rarely if ever included in survey courses or anthologies of American literature. In England, Irish and Welsh were similarly banished from the curriculum, and actually suppressed in schools. Even in the case of a major canonical writer such as Milton, only his English-language works are commonly studied: no survey anthology of English literature that I know of includes any of Milton's Latin poetry. Milton was fluent in Latin and proud of his poetic ability in the language, but we take it for granted that his Latin poems aren't worth our while—and this is a judgment that most of us have made without ever having read any of them. Similarly, in India the bilingual poet Mirza Ghalib is beloved as an Urdu poet and ignored as a Persian poet—even though Ghalib himself preferred his own Persian poems to his Urdu ones.

Along with understanding the importance of alternatives to the "national language," we need to give greater weight to translated works, not only as distant "influences" from which we can plot the greatness of our great national writers, but also in many cases as works that actually become part of the literary culture into which they are translated. If we attend to what was being published and read in a given time and place, we will often find that the national literary space includes a far higher proportion of translated works than our courses and our literary histories usually allow. English departments, for example, have typically given students survey courses that move from *Beowulf* to *The Canterbury Tales* and on to "the Rise of the Novel" in Defoe, Richardson, Sterne, and Fielding. Yet such a parochial evolution would have surprised Henry Fielding, who had

never heard of *Beowulf*. The sole surviving manuscript of *Beowulf* hadn't yet been discovered by Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin, an Icelandic scholar who visited England in 1786 looking for Scandinavian material. And when Laurence Sterne's opinionated hero Tristram Shandy comes to discuss his favorite authors, neither Chaucer nor Defoe makes the grade. His great inspirations, he says, are "my dear Rabelais, and dearer Cervantes."[24] Fielding wrote *Tom Jones* (1749) in comic dialog with his epic master Vergil, whom he read in Latin; Sterne would have read Cervantes in Charles Jervis's popular translation of 1742.

It is little wonder that Tristram preferred *Don Quixote* over such works as *The Canterbury Tales*. Cervantes was far more widely read in eighteenth-century England than was Chaucer, and he was far from the only influential author on the scene. From the sixteenth century until Sterne's day, Spanish and French plays and romances would often have outnumbered home-grown productions in London booksellers' shops. Their plots, themes, and imagery made their way into English-language writing in much the same way as local material would do, adopted by writers who didn't cordon off translated works in some separate mental folder from English-language originals. In this connection, we can recall that Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*—written in Latin and published in Holland in 1516—is indebted not just to Plato's *Republic*, but also to the Peninsular literature of travel and exploration. More casts his narrative in the form of conversations in Antwerp with Raphael Hythlodaeus, a sailor who had supposedly traveled to Brazil with Amerigo Vespucci and then branched out on his own for further exploration. *Utopia* was never published in England during More's lifetime; it only became part of "English" literature (narrowly defined) in 1551, when it was published in London, in an English translation.

Scholars and critics have occasionally discussed the active presence of translated works as constitutive parts of a national tradition, though these insights have rarely been developed by more mainstream national literary historians. Thus in 1894, the Mexican essayist Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera asserted that Spanish novelists had become excellent writers by reading the wealth of imported works available to them in translation. He emphasized that national *literatures* are first and foremost national *markets*, adding that "Perhaps literary scholarship will regret that I apply such plebian commercial terms, but nothing else can translate my thinking as well. […] The rebirth of the novel in Spain has coincided – and has to have coincided – with the abundance of published translations. Today the

Spanish read a lot of Zola, a lot of Daudet, a lot of Bourget, a lot of Goncourt […] In other words: the Spanish novel has been traveling, and it has learned a lot in its travels." The Argentine-American scholar Mariano Siskind cites this passage in his book *Cosmopolitan Desires*, and he comments that Gutiérrez Nájera is giving an important twist to the logic of the peripheral writer as importer of cultural goods from the cultural center: "Even before Spain or Mexico or Latin American countries generally engage the world, their marginal situation determines their role as cultural importers. But through importation, they modify the sign of their marginality and become importing/exporting cultures."[25]

The same can be said for Zhou Zuoren and Lu Xun and their friends in their effort to remake Chinese literature in dialog with world literature: through their efforts Tolstoy and Gogol became active figures within Chinese literature. More recently, Mo Yan's work would have been radically different if he hadn't encountered William Faulkner and Gabriel García Márquez in Chinese translation; these world authors were as much a part of his formative literary landscape as Wu Cheng-en and Lu Xun. As Gutiérrez Nájera already argued in the 1890s, national literary cultures have regularly become homes away from home for many foreign works. In this respect, world literature isn't just something that exists outside a country's borders; equally, it is always deeply embedded *within* national cultures. Readers chiefly experience world literature within their national setting, in the ways it is selected, translated, taught, or reviewed in the press. This literary internationalism, moreover, is not only found among peripheral literatures; it is also an important feature of the metropolitan literatures and their hegemonic languages.

With very few exceptions (Old Kingdom Egypt, Sumerian literature up to the Old Babylonian period), individual literatures have never been chthonic self-creations, but take shape within a much broader international framework. The Irish comparatist Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett already emphasized this point in 1886 in his pioneering study *Comparative Literature*.[26] Posnett traced the growth of literature from the clan to the tribe to the city-state and ultimately to the nation. He included a chapter on world literature, but not at the end: he placed it *before* his chapter on national literature, insisting that Goethe was wrong to see world literature as a newly emergent phenomenon. Posnett argued that a true world literature first arose in the Hellenistic world under the Roman Empire, long before the birth of the modern nation-state. Posnett was surely right in this, and yet the converse is also true: as distinct national cultures and

national markets have developed in the modern era, world literature has come increasingly to be sustained within them, taking different forms and serving differing purposes in the different cultural spheres in which it is published, marketed, and read.

The Reader

For all its theoretical extent, in practice world literature is what an individual reader experiences in reading works written outside the reader's own home tradition. For the nonspecialist reader of a foreign work, reading takes place in what can be described as an elliptical space bounded by the work's culture of origin and the reader's own culture. Inevitably, the reader's understanding of the foreign work will be conditioned by prior experience, first and foremost the fund of knowledge and expectations developed within the home tradition, but often also the expectations generated by previous reading of other works from the foreign culture. If we pick up a new novel by Murakami Haruki, or a previously unread classic by Gogol, we will read these books with certain expectations as to what "a Japanese novel" or "a Russian novel" will be like, if we already know other books by Kawabata and Tanizaki, or by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. The new work will interact with these expectations, potentially destabilizing them even as it takes a new shape and significance from these relations.

Particularly when we read a work in translation, the book already comes to us shaped by the translator's choices and the publisher's framing of the text for its new market. An assimilative edition can adapt the foreign work strongly toward host-country norms, while a "foreignizing" translation can emphasize the work's difference, its violation of local expectations. Writers and readers alike often turn to world literature to provide resources and aesthetic experiences beyond what is available at home. Even as readers reach out in this way, they may not realize how strongly their prior expectations affect the way they read, and people who have a good knowledge of the foreign work's language and culture are often distressed to find how the original work has become distorted in the process, whether by mistranslation or by culturally obtuse misreading, whether assimilative or exoticizing in character.

It is the role of the scholar and teacher of world literature to keep readers alive to cultural difference and to develop illuminating analyses of creative conjunctions of distant works. At the same time, it would be a mistake to suppose that a work's foreign reception involves a simple process of loss

of essence; rather, a work takes on a new form as it travels abroad, showing new facets and features that are brought into view in its new surroundings. The borders of world literature are formed at once on a global scale and at the most individual level, made and remade in the shifting relations between world-wide capital flows, national publishing industries and university systems, and the personal preferences of individual readers, who may be drawn to very different works for all sorts of reasons. The ultimate boundary of world literature is found in the interplay of works in a reader's mind, reshaped anew whenever a reader picks up one book in place of another, begins to read, and is drawn irresistibly into a new world.

References

1. Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens*, Berlin/Weimar: Aufbau, 1982. *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Conversations with Eckermann*, trans. by John Oxenford, London: Da Capo, 1998, p. 165.
2. Georg Brandes, *Die Litteratur des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts in ihren Hauptströmungen*, Leipzig: Veit, 1882/91.
3. Jonathan Kaiman, "*Finnegans Wake* Becomes a Hit Book in China," in: *The Guardian*, 5 February 2013, online at http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/feb/05.
4. Dai Congrong, "A Chinese Translation of *Finnegans Wake*: The Work in Progress," in: *James Joyce Quarterly* 47:4 (2010), pp. 579–88.
5. Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, London: Verso, 2013.
6. Jacob Edmond, *A Common Strangeness: Contemporary Poetry, Cross-Cultural Encounter, Comparative Literature*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.
7. Sukehiro Hirakawa, "Japanese Culture: Accommodation to Modern Times," in: *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 28 (1979), p. 47.
8. Werner Friederich, "On the Integrity of Our Planning," in: *The Teaching of World Literature*, ed. by Haskell Block, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960, p. 15.
9. Horst Rüdiger, "Grenzen und Aufgaben der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft", in: *Zur Theorie der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft*, hrsg. Von H. Rüdiger, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971, p. 4–5.
10. Rey Chow, "In the Name of Comparative Literature," in: *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, ed. by Charles Bernheimer, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, p. 109.

11. *Masterpieces of World Literature (in Chinese)*, 10 vols, ed. by David Damrosch and Chen Yongguo, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2015.
12. Kim Jae-yong, “From Eurocentric World Literature to Global World Literature,” forthcoming in: *Journal of World Literature*, 1:1(2016).
13. David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, Princeton, 2003.
14. Zhang Longxi, “Canon and World Literature,” *Journal of World Literature*, 1:1(2016), pp. 119–27; 120, 122.
15. Frank Kermode, *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change*, London: Faber & Faber, 1975.
16. Zhang Longxi, *Allegoresis: Reading Canonical Literature East and West*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005.
17. *The HarperCollins World Reader*, 2 vols, ed. by Mary Ann Caws and Christopher Prendergast, New York: HarperCollins, 1994, pp. xl–xli.
18. Zhang Longxi, *Allegoresis: Reading Canonical Literature East and West*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005.
19. Wiebke Denecke, *Classical World Literatures: Sino-Japanese and Greco-Roman Comparisons*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 300.
20. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
21. Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature” (2000) and “More Conjectures” (2003), repr. in: *Distant Reading*, London: Verso, 2013.
22. Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1999.*The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by M. B. DeBevoise, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2004.
23. Jing Tsu, “Getting Ideas about World Literature in China,” in: *Comparative Literature Studies*, 47:3 (2010), p. 294.
24. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, New York: Boni and Liverwright, 1960, p. 169.
25. Mariano Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014, p. 138.
26. Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, *Comparative Literature*, London: Kegan Trench, 1886.



CHAPTER 5

World Literature and the Encounter with the Other: A Means or a Menace?

William Franke

A Benjaminian Horizon for the Question Concerning World Literature

Any literary tradition, like the Chinese literary tradition—which by default has a certain exemplary value in the present discussion[1]—in order to have an effective role and presence in the world today, needs to be presented in the context of world literature. This idea of *Weltliteratur*, which stems from Goethe in the eighteenth century, has recently been the subject of much debate in the wake of works like David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* and Longxi Zhang's *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China*.[2] I will present this debate in a few of its salient features as they bear on the problem of how it is possible to encounter the other person or culture in their radical difference from oneself and one's own. This reflection will suggest how the idea of world literature can serve to highlight and preserve such difference rather than to erase it in the amalgam of globalization. However, I will present this discussion in the course of expounding an approach sharply divergent

W. Franke (✉)
Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, USA
e-mail: william.franke@vanderbilt.edu

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_5

from that of both the scholars just named, one that aims to make use of the most important insights of each of these very different proponents of world literature and to turn their tensions into synergisms.

My own approach is based on starting from what is unsayable and inexpressible in any tradition whatsoever—in other words, from the incommensurable or the "untranslatable." This is also where culture borders on the transcendent dimension of the religious, which modern society, however secularized and globalized it becomes, excludes or forgets only at its own peril. I invoke the incommensurable not in order to posit an insuperable limit to human projects of translation and mutual understanding, but for exactly the opposite reason. Paradoxically, only facing and acknowledging incommensurabilities can enable us to find our common measure. The incommensurable is the possession of none in particular, but rather the condition of possibility of all. It consists minimally in our all being mutually conditioned by one another. We find ourselves face to face with and vulnerably exposed to the *other* person and possibly to their *other* culture or ideology, which we cannot reduce to any measure of our own.

In seeking some kind of common currency for worldwide assimilation of culture and for its expression in language, the project of world literature needs therefore to safeguard and even to accentuate recognition of a dimension of reality that remains ineffable and beyond appropriation. Chinese classical traditions of Confucianism and Daoism are exemplary in their attunement to what remains beyond the reach of language. This is so from the very first lines of the *Dao-de-jing*: "The Dao that can be said is not the constant Dao" (道可道,非常道).[3] Adhering analogically to this principle, my contention is that what is constant or universal in literatures generally, their animating spirit, so to speak, needs to be acknowledged as what can never be fully or adequately said.

The Dao is the principle that animates all things and is manifest in their relations but never *as itself*. No words can ever express it adequately. Dao is, in this respect, analogous to what Walter Benjamin calls "pure language" ("die reine Sprache"). Pure language is present in all languages and in language as such, but it can be apprehended *as itself* in no language in particular. It emerges in and through translation of literary classics from one language into another as what nevertheless eludes all efforts to make it coincide with the specificities of any given language. It is rather the unity and adequacy of expression in adhering to the real that every specific language strives after but can never fully attain in isolation from other languages. Translation projects languages onto a higher ontological plane

through revealing their innermost relations with one another ("Ausdruck des innersten Verhältnisses der Sprachen zueinander") and by envisaging their integration into one true language ("Integration der vielen Sprachen zur einen wahren").[4] This vision of some kind of ideal transcendent language, however, can only be apprehended negatively.

What translation reveals as essential is not the (referential) content it communicates but the "way of meaning" ("Art des Meinens") that is proper to any language, and this can be inferred only by comparison between languages that points up the insufficiency of each on its own to attain the objective of total adequacy. Translation reveals this way of meaning by calling attention to what any given language cannot as such say and to "what in any translation is *more* than communication of content" ("dasjenige, was an einer Übersetzung *mehr* ist als Mitteilung")—the ungraspable and enigmatic more ("das Unfaßbare, Geheimnisvolle") of the purely linguistic manner of conveying and relating to reality that is proper to any given language. Benjamin illustrates this by the difference between "Brot" for Germans and "pain" for French people. The words name the same thing (bread) but in very different ways. They evoke different values and connotations, for example, by approaching their common object as the most basic nutriment for subsistence or as an extra amenity added in a restaurant, for instance, usually free of charge, in order to fill out a meal.[5] "Bread" is many things to many people. Different cultures and their respective languages approach its range of possible meanings from divergent angles.

In another intriguing analogy, Benjamin suggests that language clothes its content ("Gehalt") the way that a king's robe ("Königsmantel") with its wide folds covers his body. It is a loose fit—ungainly, voluminous, and bizarre ("unangemessen, gewaltig und fremd"). Different languages will be cut very differently in their own fantasy-filled invention of some kind of fit with the same contents. Each language therewith, through the very awkwardness or "brokenness" ("Gebrochenheit") of its fit with referential content, allusively indicates another language, one higher than itself ("eine höhere Sprache als sie ist"). Although each language's nomenclature grows out of an organic relation between language and its content, like that of a fruit and its rind ("Frucht und Schale"), it is only when set in comparison through translation that the uniqueness—and the arbitrariness—of each one's peculiar "growing" ("wächst") of a relationship with the real shows up in relief. Precisely this is the purely linguistic element that concerns the true translator ("des wahren Übersetzers"). It is what is left over as untouchable ("unberührbar") after the equivalent contents have all been translated and taken out of the language.

Not the common content but only the unique manner of its own that each language has of expressing the universal contents of the real is purely linguistic. Pure language emerges by being emancipated from the common content conveyed differently by different languages. Lining up their different manners of saying the same things, as translators, practically speaking, aim to do, is not the true task of translation as Benjamin understands it. The aim of translation from Benjamin's point of view is not rendering equivalences of meaning, but rather exposing the gaps between languages and thereby transposing the literary work into a higher, purer sphere of language ("höheren und reineren Luftkreis der Sprache," 14). This "Luftkreis" (literally "circuit of air") floating in the space between languages, I submit, is the same sphere that is suffused with light also from the idea of world literature.

By achieving the status of world literature, a literary text raises literature above all functional employments that subordinate it to other kinds of values: the work rises into the ether of auto-poetic, properly literary value that transcends all specific cultures and their instrumentalizations of language. Of course, in order to work as literature, the work of world literature can never sever its bonds with these concrete bases of meaning in particular languages and cultures, but it moves these elements of meaning beyond their own context of origin and projects them into an ambit of more general and unlimited significance. Most importantly, by refashioning the work for its life beyond its original cultural and linguistic matrix, the translator ideally liberates or "redeems" ("erlösen") the pure language that has been imprisoned in the work.

Similarly to Benjamin's pure language, we can conceive the idea of pure literature existing in an indefinable dimension that cannot be exhaustively described by any number of punctual comparisons. All descriptions of one specific literature or another, or of any particular literary object, fall short of the literary as such. Literature as such is liberated or released through election of a particular text for preservation or, in any case, for translation, whereby that work inherits a new and more capacious life in the realm of world literature. Literature takes on an unlimited value and relevance—not limited by any specific cultural parameters or subordinated to any other type of value or agenda extrinsic to itself (whether political or societal or confessional in nature). Literature becomes itself an original source of value. As such an emanating source, literature can never be detached and abstracted from social and cultural and personal contexts, yet it operates with a measure of creative freedom or autonomy within them. It can instigate new modes of feeling and experience.

This is why Benjamin states provocatively at the beginning of his essay that any consideration of the audience of an artwork is always a serious mistake. It is a mistake to take human existence or an audience as a condition presupposed by an artwork. The reverse is more true: the human addressee comes to exist in a concrete and complete manner only in and through the artwork. Translation should not be conceived of as serving either the artwork's maker or receivers in their aims and purposes. Instead, it reveals language as making use of the work and its recipients for purposes of its own. Through translation, the work shows itself as ideally aspiring to attain to an eternal afterlife.

Taken as world literature, a literary work achieves a universal scope and validity that exceeds the local and opens upon a dimension that might be called "pure literature" in analogy with Benjamin's "pure language" ("die reine Sprache"). Such a work is on its way to becoming a classic with an enduring afterlife, acceding to a new level of existence transcending its origins in a specific time and language and culture. Every literary translation belongs to a specific linguistic-historical context and yet harbors the possibility of translation into all remaining languages. It transplants ("verpflanzt") the original work into a "more final realm of language" ("endgültigeren Sprachbereich"). Translation's task is to bring the seed of pure language ("Samen reiner Sprache") eventually to ripeness ("Reife," 17).

This promotion to a higher life and more universal sphere of existence as world literature cannot be declared directly, but must be achieved indirectly. It does not exist as such except in the unlimited potential for further translations. The transcendent life of the work as world literature cannot be stated as a property that it possesses, but lies rather in the pure communicative potential of what it withholds as necessarily only implicit and, strictly speaking, incommunicable—its manner of expression.

Sensitivity to the unsayable or to what I call the "apophatic"—here, the inexpressibly unique spirit of every language and culture and person—is paramount in this process and is imperative for us to (re)learn today. This uniqueness of each, paradoxically, is also where all individuals meet and merge in the discovery of their common humanity. All of us are unique—and nothing can express, fully or adequately, the singularity which distinguishes us from all others. As far as language goes, this singularity remains "nothing"—in spite of all our best expressive efforts. And this is a predicament in which we do all share! Awareness of this negative or apophatic status of ourselves and of all our works is necessary in order to make world literature a genuine source of mutual self-discovery and respect for the

other's cultural and personal differences, as well as for one's own, rather than a steamroller that turns everything into globalized English by the flattening effect of translation.

Defense of the Apophatic as Necessary for Discovering Our Common Humanity

In some ways, what I am calling for is not so much a new horizon as an erasure of horizons. I argue for the impossibility of defining a visible, determinate horizon for reflection and thought about culture and literature. At least, I am advocating for the need to start from an orientation to what cannot be known or defined. Lucid reflection and clairvoyant vision require also acknowledging a penumbra of darkness as their surrounding condition. To some participants in the debate, the apophatic path that I trace will seem to be a *Holzweg* all too literally in the sense of a path in the woods that leads nowhere. Some such impatience, and something of a widespread predisposition against emptily speculative and sterilely theoretical tendencies sometimes imputed to apophatic thinking, can hardly be overlooked in Longxi Zhang's opening position statement critiquing Emily Apter's *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (2013) as a philosophy and even a theology of the unsayable or ineffable. Zhang protests that "untranslatability is more of an imagined aporia of philosophical or religious mysticism than a real issue."[6] This statement, alongside some others, suggests that he may feel that the unsayable has nothing at all to say to us.

Admittedly, unsayability can be and often is taken in ways that make it unproductive and irrelevant. But stopping there, in the conviction that "neither the philosophical nor the theological mystic idea of ineffability is convincing" (Zhang, 5), does not do justice to these traditions. They are rooted in our deepest sources of wisdom East and West, notably in Daoist sources like the *Zhuangzi*, which directly inspires Zhang. Even more important are the aspirations of peoples today all around the world, whom language in various ways fails. These peoples grope and strive beyond language and its limits toward a common understanding with one another. Often recognition of the impasse of linguistic insufficiency is necessary to enable them to affirm what they share in common. Precisely this recognition can catalyze their efforts to understand one another in spite of linguistic and cultural obstacles.

I wish, then, to show in this chapter how my apophatic approach is meant to work with and not against other approaches to world literature that seem to be rather more positive in adhering to some recognized values and definable guidelines. Historically, apophasis works always only in tandem with kataphasis. Negative theology needs the positive images of myth and religion in order to gain traction for the purpose of opening theological doctrine to the infinite and indefinable by negating or suspending its ineluctable human limits. It needs to do this in emphatically concrete, specific, and embodied ways.[7] Apophatic aesthetics, for instance, are not meant to replace more positive, doctrinaire, and even hyperbolic types of poetics with a monotone aesthetic of the desert, so much as to break them open and make them communicate with the infinite and with one another in modes that are unpredictable and uncontainable.[8]

Zhang in his brief opening statement throws down the gauntlet to the ideology of unsayability, at least as he finds it in a certain style of postmodern theoretical discourse, which he takes to be a remodeled elitist ethnocentrism and perhaps (I might surmise) a reactionary Mandarinism. Curiously, Zhang appears to enter into the lists, riding on the provocation of these remarks, as the chastising knight or nemesis of this perennial tendency, or perhaps temptation, of thought to evasiveness. And he is certainly not alone or isolated in these sentiments. Yet, we need also to understand the reasons for the persistence of apophasis or the negative way (*via negativa*) to truth, and even for its powerful persuasiveness to many across so many ages. After all, literature's mission can often be equated with making something count that is accorded no reality by most people's yardsticks. The imaginary or the unreal, as Blanchot reminds us, is the specific domain that literary language inhabits and makes real.[9] I believe that Zhang himself is actually a valiant champion of the apophatic—as his inspiring source text, the *Zhuangzi*, certainly is—whenever apophasis comes up in pertinent ways and in specific contexts. And there is, in fact, no other way for the apophatic to make itself felt or to register at all, since it does not as such exist. As an abstract concept, it is precisely nothing or even less than nothing—not even the concept of nothing at all. It can be made manifest only relationally.

Deeply understood, the ineffable is not an impasse standing in the way of translation or of communicability between cultures. It functions rather as their enabling condition. We need to avoid dichotomizing—to adopt one of Zhang's key terms and prescriptions—between untranslatability and translation. Either one is always already intimately at work within the

other. Likewise, recognition of incommensurabilities enables us, paradoxically, to find our common measure. It is even necessary as the only practical alternative to taking a certain party's measure as normative for all. Like Zhang, I am *against* positing the incommensurable as an unsurpassable limit, if this means defining it in some way that is supposed to set up a barrier or interpose an inviolable curtain, a veil of Mystery, sealing off access to the sacred. But recognizing the incommensurable is actually the only way we have of starting to create something in common, unless we start with one or the other party's already prefabricated formulas.

In order to avoid simply imposing on the unfranchised, all parties need to begin from no one's framework or defined system. Rather, all need to begin, in effect, from a common orientation to what has no name or identity at all and yet is latently the common ground of all existents. This orientation is best left tacit and de facto. It cannot be turned into any kind of common confession. That would be self-defeating. It can, nevertheless, be realized in all possible and imaginable styles and modes by acknowledging others and their unassimilable difference. The incommensurable is recognized already simply in recognizing the otherness of the other person. We have no right to presume upon the other's otherness, or to determine or define it, certainly not without their assent and participation. But in the end, no one has this right even over themselves. All are rather beholden to the otherness—for instance, as what we *will* be—that remains always beyond the reach of any of our own determinations and even self-determinations.

As a matter of words, the incommensurable seems to be only an abstraction. And yet it stands in for what is unspeakably concrete and more intimate to us than even our own conscious, articulate selves. It is standing right in front of us in every other person we encounter, as well as in the impenetrably dense mystery of our own bodies. It is in every instance unique and yet also universal. It is ownmost and yet common to all: it is, in fact, prior to individuation into separate selves. The question, or difficulty, is how to gain access to it. The incommensurable is equally inaccessible (and therefore also equally accessible) to all. It is an equalizer of everything that is anything, and therefore not *it*. In this role historically, the transcendent God of monotheism has provided an indispensable premise and catalyst for modern democracy in the Western world.[10]

In the introductory chapter of his book *Allegoresis*, Zhang announces a kind of credo of equality: "I will argue that the belief in the possibility of

common knowledge and cross-cultural understanding, in the availability of conceptual tools for the interpretation of human behavior across the boundaries of language, geography, culture, and time, can indeed come from a genuine appreciation of the *equal capabilities* of different individuals, peoples, and nations."[11] The equality in question here is emphatically an equal *capacity* to receive and shape creatively, rather than simply an identical fund of static standing resources. Individuals and their collectivities are equal in all being ephemeral and insubstantial, I would further suggest, if taken merely in and for themselves.

This is indeed the vision of the *Zhuangzi*, which concludes: "Ultimate speech is to be rid of speech; ultimate action is to be rid of action. How shallow it is to equate all the understanding that can be understood."[12] There are some caveats here even about equality when it is hammered into a verbal construct and is *understood*. A homogenizing equality that brings all to our own level of understanding is surely not what Zhuangzi has in mind. He envisages, instead, the radical equality of all things as finally nothing in and for themselves, but as equally beholden to relations with others in order to be anything at all in a ceaselessly changing universe.

It should be clear, then, that a stress on the apophatic, or even on the untranslatable, in no way excludes the "universalist" position that Zhang embraces. Some forms of postmodern relativism represented for Zhang by Emily Apter, among others, have employed what seem like theoretical or even theological apophaticism in the service of elitist relativism. But I wish to bring out another side of apophaticism—or rather the fact that it has no sides at all, since, like Zhuangzi's pivot, it is the unceasing self-critical negation of its own inevitable one-sidedness in every possible expression.[13] This image dizzyingly illustrates the unlimited universalizing potential and propensity of the apophatic.

There is also—not to be denied—in Zhuangzi's paradoxes a species of mysticism. He even opts for and recommends a certain kind of non-action. The mystical (and in large part apophatic) fringes of religions—whether in the shape of Sufi Muslims or Jewish Kabbalists or Christian Gnostics or Daoist sages—have always been strongly inclined to embrace the universal beyond all dogmatic confines of their own specific religious traditions and to stress the spiritual oneness of humanity irrespective of all confessional creeds. These mystical movements in the margins of official religions typically aim at a universality that is beyond definition in the terms of any specific culture. This is what I call apophatic universality.

Some Virtues of Vagueness Against Calamitous Clarity

It is, of course, perfectly possible to give a clear, formal definition of world literature. David Damrosch, most influentially, has done so in terms that likewise seem to eschew settling for anything vague and ungraspable: "My claim is that world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike."[14] The mode Damrosch envisages consists in works traveling outside the cultures and milieus of their origin by taking on significance in other countries and cultures. This augmented scope of resonance can be, and very often *is*, catalyzed by translation. In either case, the essential thing for Damrosch is the circulation itself: "I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language (Virgil was long read in Latin in Europe)" (4). Although not vague, this definition relates world literature to a potentially infinite circulation, the contents of which remain perpetually open to redefinition. Thus Damrosch acknowledges a functional limit to definitive closure. We might even detect here implicit recognition of further, deeper, structural grounds for this incompleteness.

Damrosch is thinking—to put it schematically—in something like an evolutionary mode that accounts for how literature evolves into world literature. In his definition, "literature" as such is presupposed, and much remains concealed in this term. It is important to think through how literature becomes "literature." Some seeds of becoming relevant to and for the world at large are perhaps already contained in the literary per se, even apart from functional considerations concerning works' circulation. Literature presents the world as refracted through human desire—and hope and fear, and so on. This poetic perspective, as Aristotle pointed out long ago, is more universal than any perspective that history can afford. In it, an inchoate All, consisting in all possible relations, is always already operative. Literature opens a word's meaning beyond its literal sense to all manner of metaphorical meanings via relations.

Language turns into literature by having a significance not confined by the original situation of its utterance. A literary utterance is not circumscribed by specific practical interests that motivate its enunciation. As literary, an utterance assumes broader interest and a more general value. It has

aesthetic value, according to Kant, precisely to the extent that its worth is attributed to it disinterestedly—by all, regardless of their own needs and purposes. In these respects, literature is already incipiently oriented to universal and potentially global significance. Damrosch's definition indicates how literature evolves from the local into the global. Yet, just as essentially, the local emerges only in and from the global, which in some ways precedes it. Literature develops in and from an unlimited weave or entanglement of relations and motives that precedes and exceeds anything that can be framed and circumscribed as a work or an object—or even perhaps as a discrete field of culture. There is generally some aspect of stepping back from all positively given realities in the (literary) gesture of (re)imagining the world.

Damrosch shrewdly brings out a constitutive distance and detachment as characteristic of reading texts as world literature.[15] As world literature, a work is read in relation to other cultures and contexts rather than only through immersion in its original culture and context. This refracted style of reading can be highly revealing and yields not necessarily less "original" insights than do more straightforward, historically contextualized readings. By reading works as world literature, Damrosch observes, "We encounter the work not at the heart of its source culture but in the field of force generated among works that may come from very different cultures and eras" (300). There is a deracinating effect here that opens works to new associations that can be productive of new meanings. This grafting of disparate contexts on one another opens up a "space" between cultures that, for all its vagueness, may in some ways prove to be more momentous and productive than any strictly objective determination within the frame of a given culture. This open space without fixed horizons is in crucial respects the element most appropriate to literature in its unlimited creative potential.

Damrosch has praised and embraced world literature for its virtues of "detached engagement" as less destructive than typically imperialistic enterprises that are aimed at appropriating foreign cultures. The latter are emblematized by the grandiose 1798–1801 campaign of Napoleon in Egypt, which proved disastrous for the French and the Egyptians alike. In a similar critical spirit, I suggest the apophatic or inconceivable as the unbounded horizon that perpetually unhinges our framework and breaks apart its presumable fusions. Rather than seeking to dominate and control a domain, we find ourselves on an open and level playing field without the confinement of a defined horizon. We all become estranged from ourselves and are thereby first enabled and obliged to find ourselves through one another. This is the common humanity that King Lear, for example,

discovers only when he is stripped bare by radical negation of his kingship. He discovers it through relations to others, including a clown and a beggar and his own youngest daughter, all formerly his inferiors.

Such undoing and deranging of our comprehensive frame or horizon constitute an apophatic moment in the movement toward becoming world literature. Damrosch himself suggests that the shift in contexts may lead to "almost the opposite of the 'fusion of horizons'" envisaged by hermeneutic thinkers such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and, I must add, Hans-Georg Gadamer, as conferring this vocabulary on critical thinking today. The skewing of horizons that brings the foreignness of works fully into view, as suggested by Damrosch, produces rather an effect of estrangement. This effect was considered by the Russian formalist school to be the specific characteristic of literary language. Such language was perceived as different from ordinary usage and even as rendering the latter strangely unfamiliar. Yet "defamiliarization" is perhaps most important not only for perceiving the foreignness of the foreign work, but also for making us perceive more of what is latently strange in our own language and culture. It thereby enables us to become strangers to ourselves.

The strangeness in question is thus a shared condition and not just an insuperable barrier. It entails an effect of (dis)orient(aliz)ation that does not deprive us of a universal relation to others. Indeed, Longxi Zhang argues cogently against the alienating depiction of cultures as wholly "other."[16] It is more our recognizing our own otherness to ourselves that enables and motivates us to open up to the common humanity that bonds us together. Zhang accordingly understands the fusion of horizons as a way of transcending both self and other. Such fusion, uniting presumable strangers, is enshrined in the classical Chinese wisdom of *yin–yang*, which in Zhang's terms breaks our "dichotomies" down into "differences" that are susceptible of comparison.

Otherness begins at home and in our own selves. If each person and analogously each culture is uniquely individual, this uniqueness is nothing that can be said as such, for *individuum ineffabilis est*. The deepest core of our existence and reality is nothing sayable. But precisely this condition of nothingness at our center is universally shared. It is, furthermore, the precondition of human freedom.[17] Otherwise, we would find ourselves always already predetermined by some given nature or fixed essence. The self-critical exposure of this universal "nothingness" within, in our deepest core, is the key to unlocking the richest resources of our humanity: they can be possessed by none except in being shared—that is, by being received from, and also given to, others.

Conceptual Universals Versus Common Humanity

Knowing and acknowledging this nothing at the core of our individual existence is the key to our finding common ground with others—with all others and not only with the like-minded. In fact, our unbridgeable difference from one another is also what we share in common with them. While nominally all absolutely singular existences are Nothing, this "Nothing" is actually individual and incommensurable in each case as an infinitely separate real existence.[18] Common grounds are best recognized, or rather forged, against a background of recognizing ineffaceable incommensurability. But typically just the opposite is attempted, even if it takes forcing. Common grounds are simply posited as clear and universal and as coercing recognition by all alike. Such claims are frequently heard today, for example, from advocates for human rights or for cognitive universals.

The universalism of such approaches is echoed by Longxi Zhang. He makes deferential reference to the cognitive linguistics of Lakoff and Johnson as proving the universality of certain conceptual constants across cultures. For cognitive linguists, the metaphors of different cultures may be curiously and marvelously varied, but they express conceptual structures that are invariable and grounded in the species structure of the body and brain.[19] This type of universality is championed by Edward Slingerland in his influential advocacy of cognitive science, and particularly in his attempt to make it palatable for humanities scholars.[20]

This cognitive approach, however, aims at a reduction to physical reality as basic. Slingerland admits and even insists on this. We are our bodies, and they are machines, even if we are predisposed and even biologically programmed not to accept this fact, in his view. I maintain that cognitive theories such as those of Lakoff and Johnson or Mark Turner are poised between two different possibilities and divergent directions in their application. They can open up knowledge to its metaphorical and physical-emotional contingency—à la Vico[21]—or, alternatively, they can impose a mechanistic explanation on everything. But this latter alternative entails erasure of all that is other. And the erasure involves not just other cultures: there is also an effacement of the otherness that is each one's own, the otherness to ourselves, from which we all come.

China and the West can agree all too well in adopting and exploiting the conceptual tools and technologies that afford mastery over the world, starting from the world of nature. But that which is suppressed and lost when we make concepts the medium of universality is what is other to all

our human making and technological control. The human has another dimension, a shadowy side that is refractory to rational analysis and control. It is witnessed to, among other ways, by the imagery of myth and the rites of religion, or even by the unconscious as revealed through psychoanalysis. This other reality—which is also witnessed to by common and yet incalculable experiences such as love and freedom and anxiety—is endangered wherever the apophatic is forgotten and aggressively (or even inadvertently) erased.

What threatens to preempt the dimension of transcendence is not the common but the conceptual, or more exactly the reduction of the common to the conceptual, for this can make it impossible for us to discern and respect otherness even in ourselves. This is why world *literature* is so important to any world-scale cultural project such as comparative religions or philosophy. Literary sensibility and perceptiveness are necessary in order to check the intrinsically dominating propensities of strictly conceptual thinking. Metaphorical language and fictive and mythic narration catalyze non-reductive forms of representation. They help us not to see ourselves and the world just as blobs of matter or as brain machines (as scientific rationality left to its own devices in the cognitive sciences has a strong tendency to do), but as having a spiritual dimension—and in this sense as indwelt even by divinity. At issue with human beings, ultimately, is not just an empirical reality but also an ethical and metaphysical—not to say theological—capacity. This is a matter of not taking possession, not even of ourselves, by humanly wrought and defined concepts. For the latter are but instruments, tools that we have forged, for working our will upon things—but only as reduced to what we recognize and cognize about them.

Cultural Universals Confronting Absolute Difference

Longxi Zhang started off the 2015 Beijing World Literature summit with a pointed protest against taking recourse to the ineffable, since this move can be a cheap evasion and work simply as a kind of mystification of our all-too-human problems. Admittedly, one of the liabilities of the apophatic is its vagueness. Although in many contexts there can be much virtue in vagueness,[22] this gesture of evoking our limits is certainly not enough in all circumstances, at least not as the sole resource deployed. It must not be allowed to become merely a weak excuse for condemning different cultures to remain in mutual isolation. Moreover, the meeting of minds made

possible by the Beijing summit was certainly an exceptional opportunity to articulate a clear concept of world literature and some pragmatically useful guidelines for it. However, concepts are not enough, either, for dealing with culture. Cultures relate to something radically refractory to conceptual analysis. Culture is no more reducible to concepts than is language.[23]

Zhang is arguing against a philosophy of relativism that claims that cultures are incommensurable and cannot understand one another. He protests against "an excessive emphasis on their difference and alterity" to the exclusion of universality in recent criticism and sinology (*Mighty Opposites*, 8). I share this concern with him in the field of comparative philosophy and poetics.[24] And yet I am also arguing for radical incommensurability not just between cultures, but also within them and even within each one of us—as an essential moment of non-identity with oneself that is characteristic of the human as such. We must recognize ourselves as inhabited by the incommensurable in order to recognize ourselves and others ethically, or even just accurately.

The human is not, finally, measurable, and all the features of it that are relatively measurable need to be seen against this horizon of the incommensurable, which inhabits us from before our possession even of our own selves. In this perspective, the commensurabilities that do give conceptual tools for comparing and conjoining cultures are clearly seen to be fabricated. Only then are such common denominators *not* at risk of being absolutized, and this is so precisely because one remains mindful of the incommensurable absolute to which everything human (and therefore also moral) is beholden. This move against the idolatry of the objective can be felt and registered as the absolute ethical demand of responsibility to the other, as Emmanuel Levinas so powerfully demonstrated.[25] It can also be manifest in religious convictions and devotions, and in various forms of social commitment.

Difference and alterity, even between cultures as widely separated from each other as the Chinese and the Western, are always defined within some sense of common intelligibility. Zhang (like François Jullien) usefully points this out. But there is also a kind of alterity that can never be recognized and acknowledged too much, or even sufficiently. It can hardly be exaggerated, even after all the relativizing perspectives have been given their due. Beyond just agreeing among ourselves (inevitably just some of us) about common standards, there remains still a question of respect for others and even for ourselves beyond all our own self-conceptions. What altogether transcends our capacity of conceptualization needs to be

safeguarded and highlighted by universalizing projects like world literature. Because they resort inevitably to common denominators like translation into English, such projects run the risk of reducing the universal to what is in fact only a particular form of its expression, one among many. It is not English per se that should be elevated as the universal language, but the universality of language as such (Benjamin's "pure language") for human beings and for communication in general.[26] Such universality is merely convoyed by translation into a worldwide language, which happens in our historical moment to be English.

Self-critique as a Path to the Transcendent and Universal

Aspiration to the transcendent universal is often identified as a danger in almost any human or cultural context. David Damrosch evokes this danger in discussing the self-appointed vocation of comparative literature in the styles of René Wellek or Albert Guérard to battle down the nationalistic heresy that would seek to confine literature to the boundaries of the nation-state grid of the globe.[27] Abstraction from the particular, blurring of specificity, and amateurism all threaten to take hold when the impulse to transcendent universalism becomes dominant. These dangers are indeed real. Still, we need not forget, as Hölderlin famously wrote, that "Where there is danger, there grows also redemption" ("wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch," "Patmos").

Why do the styles of thought designated with this label of "transcendent" arise in the first place and continue irrepressibly to assert themselves? They must correspond to something inherent in human beings and their cultural aspirations. This impulse I take to be an intercultural constant that can be verified in Western and in Chinese traditions alike, starting from their respective literary classics and founding religious texts.[28] It can have dangerous aspects and potentials, but something as persistent and perennial as the quest for the universal and transcendent cannot simply be excised from the human psyche like a non-adaptive vestigial organ. It has been a constant of civilization at least since its momentous discovery across cultures, from Greece to Israel and Persia, India, and China in the middle of the first millennium BC in the so-called Axial Age.[29] It needs, instead, to be understood and controlled and cultivated.

Damrosch himself concedes—or rather maintains—that "Great works of literature do have a transcendent quality that enables them to reach across time and space and speak directly to us today" (135). He is far from insensitive to this transhistorical demand and its claim on us. Still, for him, as for most critically minded individuals today, the emphasis probably falls on the dangers posed by the programs of cultural hegemony inspired and supported by ideologies laying claim to some form of transcendent universality. This is why I feel it is imperative to bring out the necessarily and infinitely *self-critical* character of specifically *apophatic* transcendence and universality. These forms involve a negative theology that by rights undercuts all positive theologies—or rather, renders them critical of their own dogmatic formulations and returns them to their status as striving against the impossible in their effort to manifest the divine. Accessing divinity is impossible for negative theologians except by their relinquishing their own authority in self-abandon to the inconceivable and to total reliance on its grace, on its lending them *its* power, which is not their own. It is in this sense, I suggest, that we ought to be receptive to the drive to transcendence particularly in the form of self-criticism—indeed, of infinite or unlimited self-criticism. This drive entails a constant readiness to transcend our own achieved system and framework. The apophatic withdrawal of all our own assertions makes space for the uncoerced self-manifestation of things in their otherness and in the persuasiveness of their own truth.

The reference to the incommensurable and transcendent (like reference to "pure language") does not solve political or philological problems of a determinate nature, but it is part of the necessary strategies of displacement taking us beyond already drawn boundary lines. In this way, it serves to create a space for the reconceptualizations that are so crucial to the work of the comparatist. The converse, admittedly, is equally true: the generalist has a responsibility to take specialized knowledge of the subject into consideration and to refract its most significant discoveries. As Damrosch sagely remarks, "The specialist's knowledge is the major safeguard against the generalist's own will to power over texts that otherwise all too easily become grist for the mill of a preformed historical argument or theoretical system" (287). He prescribes that "the generalist should feel the same ethical responsibility toward specialized scholarship that a translator has toward a text's original language: to understand the work effectively in its new cultural or theoretical context while at the same time *getting it right* in a fundamental way with reference to the source culture" (288).

I accept this reciprocal qualifying of the general and the specialized willingly, but what I propose, with apophatic thinking, is more of the order of a universal anti-system that is open to all and exclusive of none. Damrosch points out that “A category from which nothing can be excluded is essentially useless” (110). However, while it is useless for purposes of categorizing, it may help shift us into another dimension and into another kind of thinking altogether at the boundaries of, and opening beyond, categorical thinking. Literary visionaries have often imagined the theological trope of the coincidence of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*). This way of seeing the world marks many of the most exalted works of world literature, from the *Book of Tao* through the *Divine Comedy* to *Finnegans Wake*. It is the specific focus of many more treasures and treatises of philosophical and mystical literature, such as Nicholas of Cusa’s *De docta ignorantia* (1440) and Angelus Silesius’s *Cherubinischer Wandersmann* (1657).

The open and indefinite space of literature exists only as incarnate in particular languages: they thereby become metaphors for language as such. Consequently, transcendence is not to be opposed to the immanence of particularity and its claims, but should rather be seen as the means of keeping interpretation of particulars infinitely open to reinterpretation and reappropriation in the uncircumscribable contexts of world literature. In this undertaking, generalist and specialist alike need each other reciprocally.

The Space of Literature as Matrix for an Apophatic Approach

Comparative study in the humanities illustrates the tension between divergent methods for reading literature. Some are based on defining specific differences of sensibility and of conception between traditions, while others emphasize certain common and universal aspirations animating literary endeavor across cultures. My approach finds the common, unifying resource for critical thinking of all types in the apophatic—the unsayable ground or background that enables all making of sense without itself ever becoming fully accessible and exhaustively manifest through the differentiating, signifying action of signs. This orientation attends to an undefined dimension of the “space of literature” as the arena of an always yet-to-be-defined universality.[30] An apophatic approach, beginning from the indefinable, also emancipates criticism from standard, generalizing characterizations and reigning stereotypes, and thereby enables interpretation to concentrate

fully on the emergent singularity of local traditions and individual works. There is no finally correct paradigm for what surpasses conceptual definition, but only the latter's infinitely various manifestation in phenomena illuminated dialectically by comparison with one another.

The idea of world literature, within this approach, proves by design to be resistant to any general conceptual definition. It is conceivable, instead, only within the horizon of the inconceivable. Criticism in this open horizon can benefit from assimilating the negative philosophical methods of self-critical reflection and of negative theology in order to better fulfill its mission of serving to generate a basis for common dialogue among peoples, scholars, and students of all countries and cultures. I have undertaken in previous publications,[31] as well as in a new book venturing into the domain of intercultural philosophy,[32] to demonstrate how this methodological principle shows itself to be necessary and highly liberating. At present, in this chapter, I engage in the debate among leading scholars of comparative literature championing the notion of world literature, and I extend and connect this debate to issues concerning access to other cultures that are discussed among intercultural philosophers.

The new (non-)conceptual horizon that I, along with other comparative cultural theorists and like-minded comparative literature scholars, am seeking to discern is to be found especially in the self-critical capacity of conceptual thinking to become conscious of its own limits and, on that basis, to open itself up to what lies beyond them. This process of reflection opens up from what seems a typically philosophical maneuver into what is eminently a literary way of thinking. It is inventive and conjectural, not grounded in any positive, independently given object. Literary thinking thinks rather in and from the world that it projects through its own desire.[33] But it is also capable of negating its own desires and of relating self-critically to others and to *their* desires. This, too, opens into the dimension of the infinitely possible and uncontainable "espace littéraire" ("space of literature"), in the phrase of Maurice Blanchot that I have already appropriated and invest anew. This vocation of literature or literary thinking to a universal dimension in the conversation between cultures lies near to the heart of the urgent motivation for world literature in our present worldwide cultural-historical predicament.

The interpretation of literature and its cultural underpinnings is indispensable for its instruction in how to think in ways that are not all dictated by strictly technical and analytic methods. These methods have increasingly tightened their grip on all aspects of culture, starting from the various

aspects of economic organization and administrative control that so dominate practical life in modern society. In our current international predicament, the need for cultivation of traditional humanities knowledge—including the poetic knowing that has been transmitted exemplarily also in East Asian classics and their commentaries—has become only the more urgent and acute. In crucial respects, as Gayatri Spivak suggests, relaying Jacques Derrida's respect for rhetoric as more fundamental than philosophical logic, literature must become "our teacher." The very undecidability of the poetic figure, with its rhetorical capacity of reaching beyond the grid of dichotomous logic and its formal categorizations, becomes an indispensable resource as we attempt to forge cultural practices adequate to the planetary world to come.[34]

The Apophatic Calling from the Space of World Literature

World literature emerged as a means, furthermore, of undermining and breaking up national literary traditions and challenging their self-serving canons. Martin Kern's response to Zhang Longxi stressed this and conjured up the specter of a globalization that makes all literature a consumer item rather than an unfathomably fecund reservoir of reflection and richly nuanced perceptions. Damrosch likewise emphasizes the different dynamic into which literary texts and classics are placed through the recontextualization incurred concomitantly with their becoming world literature. Literature is freed from parochial frames of interpretation fixing their meaning in terms of certain countries and cultures and their own characteristic coordinates. However, from the other side, there is a risk of literature being coopted by worldwide webs and systems, with their unitary codes, and so being subdued by engines of homogenization and of the suppression of difference. At stake here is not only qualitative cultural difference, the local differences between one tradition and another, but, more radically, the deeper difference even with and from ourselves. Kern touched on this with his reference to the non-identical ("das nicht Identische") in the philosophy of Theodor Adorno. The latter is the Difference through which the ethical and religious dimensions of human experience open up.

It is conceivable that all manner of objective differences could be signaled and articulated in and through an overall system or overarching scheme. But there is something else that would be lost in however

comprehensive an inventory of differences: there remains still a difference of a more indefinable kind. It finds its place in the theories of Niklas Luhmann as the "unmarked" and in those of Giorgio Agamben (following Jakob Böhme) as "segnatura," a kind of signature of the Creator that is not a sign among others but rather overdetermines the valence of them all. For a time, Jacques Derrida held the academy's attention spell-bound by free play with this indefinable difference as "différance." But in all these cases such difference proves impossible to objectively focus on and eventually defies all attempts to attend to it as a solid crystallization or in any stable form whatsoever. It has been variously treated as "ontological difference" (Heidegger), or as the "religious difference," or even "the Christian difference" between God and the world, Creator and creation.[35] It aspires to divinity as absolute difference or transcendence, for example, in Kierkegaard's existentialist backlash against Hegel's all-comprehensive logical system of immanence.

In all these extremely various forms, this undifferentiatable difference has to do with the experience of being face to face with the absolutely Other, certainly with the other person and perhaps even with what is experienced and theorized as the transcendence of divinity.[36] This experience spurs theological reflection in its attempt to find metaphors and allegories for an analogical approach to the experience of the unsayable and unrepresentable. For Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa, God as absolute simplicity is different from every other being by alone having no definable distinguishing difference.

As we forge a more and more worldwide system of literature, we are ever more in danger of thinking of it as comprehensive and therewith of forgetting all its others, all that any system inevitably leaves out—all forms of the Difference that no system of differences can comprehend. World literature might seem to make all literatures one. In this summit gathering, under the guidance of recognized leaders in the field, we have understood world literature as standing necessarily in a dialectical relation with national literatures and maybe also with other sub-fields of literature that are not drawn along the lines of political boundaries. Folk literature, oral literature, religious literature, disciplinary literatures, a variety of multimedia "literatures," cartoon literature, might all have some kind of claim to universal interest. Nonetheless, in any of these cases, specific works would belong to world literature in a sense in which the literary is unclassifiable and rather a channel to what defies comprehension. The works are the source of a universality that gives and creates experience without being itself conceivable.

For Kant, art generally, and therewith also poetic literature, is oriented to the dimension of the inconceivable—or at least of what cannot be analyzed exhaustively in terms of concepts. For him, this status of exceeding strictly objective comprehension applies to aesthetic experience as resting on judgments of experience that cannot be adequately demonstrated purely by concepts. This, then, is one philosophically precise sense in which literature is intrinsically about the inconceivable and in which its horizon is open to conceptually unlimited experience. This applies in a specific way to aesthetics, and more generally it applies also to other value realms, including ethics and religion. Whatever proves to be most important to us proves also to be inevitably beyond all fixed and definable categories. This is asserted again in Wittgenstein's theory, in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), of value discourses such as ethics and religion as factually and conceptually nonsense. We live, if not *in*, then at least *from*, the dimension of the infinite and indefinable.

If we forget this inconceivable dimension, we are in danger of identifying the universal and world literature with some particular and positive form of culture that will circumscribe its universality. It is admittedly delimited at least as "literature," yet that too is best understood as but an avenue of access to the unlimited. World literature offers an opportunity to open this avenue in its universal bearing and relevance to society and culture in general and at large through a particular institution, namely, the study of literature in our universities.

My main thrust is to emphasize the relation to the open and infinite as belonging intrinsically to the nature of literature itself and as marking its special capacity for meaning and for conveying human values like love or freedom, which know no intrinsic limits. In this sense, a certain vocation to or possibility of becoming world literature could be seen as inherent in the literary as such. The literary gesture of sharing experience with a reader who is not otherwise connected with it involves a drive to the unconditioned. Literature as such entails detaching, or at least widening, human meaning and value from the particular circumstances in which they are generated. Beyond just effectuating a transfer from one category to another, from the local to the global, world literature is a powerful token of a vocation inherent to literature of rising beyond and defying the limits of categorical reasoning. Literature is a free expression of the human spirit that may set boundaries only at the same time as it exercises its freedom of reaching out beyond them.[37]

Becoming World Literature as a Process of Self-disappropriation

This suggests why our common worry as comparatists has been that world literature can become a steamroller for flattening all literature into a uniform, consumable shape as translated into English. However, it can also be the way of placing us face to face with the radical difference of what cannot be said—or with what I call the apophatic—by dispossessing us even of what is presumably our own. This happens especially when our "own" revered classics come back to us as world literature: they have to be rediscovered and reinherited as sometimes quite different in their significance from what we previously held them to be. We have to confront the rest of the world—the Other—opening up in the midst of our inner constitution of ourselves and of our own identity.

An inspired idea implicitly driving the agenda of world literature is that everything comes to us from the other, or at least from others. What is ownmost, or held to be our own, is not truly ours except in the moment of our own radical dispossession. We receive what is our own only from our encounter with the other. Such a relational vision of reality is a vision that transcends the world seen in terms of objectified essences or properties. Only through entering into circulation can properties be possessed or perceived as belonging anywhere—and even then only as on loan and in transit. This is the nature of belonging and of the proper—to be perceived precisely and paradoxically in the moment of disappropriation. *Yin* and *yang*—the one always inevitably brings on the other as already inherent in its own core. This core is—or can only be lived out as—nothing but the relation to the Other.

This is why world literature cannot be just a summative, cumulative concept forged by adding national literatures together. It rather takes literature to a "new place" (Kern), a universal place—the space of literature. As world literature, literature discovers and affirms itself in its vocation to speak out beyond all confining political borders and self-enclosed cultural spheres. Yet much more than just the variants of classifiable differences that can be catalogued is at stake in the idea of world literature. In my previous experience, I have encountered the concept of world literature typically as an English department's alternative to comparative literature. The argument goes that the English department already "covers"—or can and should cover—literature in other languages, so there is no need for comparative literature as a separate program at all. This reasoning affords

administrators a golden opportunity to economize by consolidating units and reducing staff. It also revives the resentments between competing colleagues and their rivaling factions, stirring up new opportunities to take advantage and settle scores in old power struggles—to the satisfaction of some and the disgruntlement of others.

Apart from this all-too-human side of institutional politics, comparative literature harbors or at least connects with world literature through the work of translation. Translation, however, does not concern only the languages that are being translated *from* and being used *for* the translation—the "source language" and the "target language," respectively. At stake in translation—what is drawn on and aimed at—is something else entirely. Through translation, literature is freed from specific limits and determinations and is made into a medium of circulation beyond all boundaries of particular languages and cultures. Literature is revealed as something of a miraculously protean medium, a matrix of unlimited metamorphoses. This process projects language and culture onto a higher ontological plane. Literature is not apprehended as an object or instrument to be manipulated by human subjects, but rather as something of an agent in its own right, one that creates, or at least transforms, the world.

The Negative-Theological Notion of Pure Language/Literature

Something of this kind was the intuition inspiring Walter Benjamin's theory of language and literature in "The Task of the Translator" ("Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers"), which the present chapter endeavors to extend to a reflection on world literature. Benjamin's essay was, in fact, originally an introduction to translations of Baudelaire's "Tableaux Parisiens" and is, as such, intrinsically connected with the production of world literature through translation of a literary classic. Through translation, as in this classic model, world literature opens the dimension of "pure language" ("die reine Sprache," 13), and we might also say, analogously, or by extension, of "pure literature." *Pure* language can be seen as a negative theological notion that attributes to language no positive qualities, but only the negation of all finite, determinate content as "impure." Applied or turned negatively ("negativ gewendet"), the idea of pure language functions rather as an integrative ideal for harmonizing languages among themselves in their common "intention" ("Intention") of expressing the real.

Each individual language on its own gives only a limited and unstable access to the objects it envisages. Various languages' approaches to the same reality even exclude one another, since their respective metaphors make choices of conception that are incompatible. In the shifting play of various languages' angles of approach or "manners of meaning," pure language remains concealed. But translation places these differences in the frame of a history of evolution toward the expression of what they all intend in common. The messianic end ("messianische Ende") of this history is the reconciliation of all languages, the harmony of the different ways of meaning ("Harmonie all jener Arten des Meinens") proper to individual languages (14).

Translation enables this ideal to be glimpsed at the same time as it shows how far individual languages are from actually attaining it. Pure language flashes out as lit up by translation, whenever and wherever translation is ignited by the afterlife ("Fortleben") of the work, by its glory, we might infer, and by the unending resurrection or springing to life ("Aufleben") of language. Still, in Benjamin's finally messianic and eschatological vision of the redemption of language, pure language is understood only apophatically as a negation of the communication of objective, referential contents. What makes the redemption and afterlife of the work of world literature possible is precisely what cannot be translated or communicated ("ein Nicht-Mitteilbares," 19), nor even be adequately said, and just that, paradoxically, is both universal and unique. This is the negative-theological or apophatic predicament which constrains us to concede that translation cannot translate what is essential in the poetic utterance, namely, "the ungraspable, the enigmatic, the 'poetic'" ("das Unfaßbare, Geheimnisvolle, 'Dichterische,'" 9). This remains per se inaccessible as pure language. Nevertheless, this limit calls attention to what motivates translation from one language into another—and beyond that into the higher sphere of world literature, namely, the intention ("Intention") which all languages share in common to communicate the real as fully as possible.

Pure language, as conceived by Benjamin, is expressed especially in the silent ("schweigend") *intention* that all languages share in common to communicate the real and true and to do so wholly and without remainder. The intention is, as in the Garden of Eden, to make sign and object correspond perfectly, and signifier and signified coincide, so that what is said is perfectly adequate to what is meant. For this to be the case, pure language must include the molten potential for all possible manners of

saying and conceiving. The task of the translator is to set free into the translator's own language this pure language that is found in actual languages only as "banished" into what is foreign to it—into information and content—and so placed under the spell of another language, a fact-stating or information-giving language. Benjamin states this explicitly in his definition of the task of the translator: "It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work."[38] The translator fulfills this task especially by making his or her own language strange in order to enable it to accommodate the foreign work. The mutual estrangement of languages after Babel points to their distance from the one true and adequate language that alone would reconcile them. On this account, the ultimate intention of language and literature turns out to be eschatological and redemptive.

The imagined wholeness of language as such, consisting in its perfect adequacy to express the world of things in all its emotional tones and differentiated, nuanced possibilities of conception, can be evoked by each actual human language, but only as lacking. Translation exposes this lack. Precisely by exposing the untranslatable essence of each language, translation provokes an imagining of the totality intended by all languages taken together: they show up as being like the shards of a shattered vase ("Scherben eines Gefäßes"). Translation exposes the untranslatable essence of each language by rendering the strangeness of the work in the receiving—the so-called host—language. "True translation" must not read like an original that is consummate and complete in its own right. In that case, the translation would stand in the light of the original and overshadow it. Instead, the true translation, by opening up and highlighting the gap between it and the original, allows the light of pure language to fall on the original all the more fully.[39]

When all the constraints of a literal, communicative sense are eliminated and the sense plummets from abyss to abyss ("stürzt der Sinn von Abgrund zu Abgrund"), the bottomless depths of language ("bodenlosen Sprachtiefen") themselves threaten to reduce language to silence (21). The archetype of such translation for Benjamin is Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles. Rather than furnishing equivalences for forms of expression, which are peculiar to each language, true translation opens the unfathomable depths of non-equivalence to view and thus relates language to its infinite, abysmal groundlessness. Pure language is like a tangent touching communicative content at one point only and otherwise following its own trajectory to infinity (19–20). Likewise, world literature, as literature with

an afterlife, is uprooted from its culture of origin and follows its trajectory to infinity in shedding light purely as literature unbounded by any specific context, although refracting its manifold relatedness to cultures in ways unconfined by any pre-established cultural-conceptual framework.

The Return of One's Own as World Literature

World literature implies the extension of translation on a global scale beyond all regional boundaries, presumably for purposes of building a kind of literary canon. It aims to offer the finest fruits and most exquisite flowers of literary cultivation to all irrespective of their national or ethnic or regional origin. We have considered through this discussion among comparatists how becoming world literature prevents the classics from being limited to their appropriations for merely nationalistic purposes, or for the ideological aims of one specific and exclusive cultural politics. As world literature, classic works attain a wider and potentially more lasting significance. They become anyone's and everyone's property. There is a necessary letting go of one's own culture in order to let great works operate as world literature. Only when we receive our own literature back from others has it truly become world literature for us, too. But then it comes back to us radically changed in its fundamental significance. An intriguing example can be found in the *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights* (كتاب ألف ليلة وليلة *Kitāb ʾAlf Laylah wa-Laylah*), which existed as a little-known and not highly esteemed work for centuries until it was translated into French by Antoine Galland in the early eighteenth century and became fabulously popular in Europe. Only afterwards did it acquire prestige in the Arab world and assume status as a classic instead of being regarded as an embarrassing congeries of low-life, lascivious tales.

There may be an inevitable flattening through translation of particular nuances that are possible only in a given language or culture, but translation also frees a work for new associations that can engender previously unsuspected possibilities of meaning. This is why classics never finish saying what they have to say ("Un classico è un libro che non ha mai finito di dire quel che ha da dire"), as Italo Calvino put it in his essay "Why Read the Classics?"[40] Translation in this respect can actually furnish means of *resistance* to the literary work's being contained by one uniform code, or to its being circumscribed by a historically or ideologically fixed framework. In becoming world literature, the work is translated into a kind of universal language that remains open and evolving as the work migrates from language to language and so travels into further cultural and historical universes.

Even if English has become, practically speaking, a universal linguistic medium of the world in our time, the omnibus of world literature breaks it apart into many, in effect, different languages. Salmon Rushdie's Indian English and Derek Walcott's Caribbean English are new revelations of the English language, as are also the poetic languages of Native American authors including Layli Longsoldier, Linda Hogan, Leslie Marmon Silko, Lance Henson, Maurice Kenny, John Trudell, and Norman Scott Momaday. And this happens not only at the level of language. Taken as world literature, classics like James Fennimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* or Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* come back to an American audience profoundly changed and unsettled from what they seemed to mean in their original contexts. Huck's apparently good-natured and always serviceable negro companion, Jim, can suddenly come sharply to light as a locus revealing racial tensions that tear the American union asunder.

I wish to focus for a moment, in closing, on a particular example of this metamorphosis of a literary oeuvre through its becoming world literature. Through its promotion to standing as a world classic, Walt Whitman's poetic corpus is transfigured and takes on a new and different dimension of significance from what it has traditionally had for most American readers. Whitman becomes not just the poet of a rugged American individualism, as expressed quintessentially in *Song of Myself*. He shows up, rather, as a dispossessed prophet overtaken by a messianic eschatological history. He has long been recognized as the poet of the body ("I sing the body electric"), of the earth and immanence, while the dimension of prophetic and theological transcendence has remained relatively unapparent, or submerged, at least for American, secular, academic critics. Although Whitman's poetic testament seems to announce the modern secular era of American democracy, a self-made nation constructed by self-made men and women, what comes out clearly when he is read more in a European historical perspective is his continuity with religious tradition, notably that of the Bible and prophetic poetry. The Bible turns up here at the heart of secular, democratic America, for it is the model of a poetry that is the authentic voice of the people, just as it was for Johann Gottlieb Herder and his mentor, Johann Georg Hamann.[41] Whitman is unveiled by such a post-secular reading as the poet of an immanent transcendence, projecting the American experience and its promise into the utopian sphere of apocalyptic prophecy.[42]

All America and the entire world is brought into Whitman's elastic democratic embrace. But Whitman is also deeply a poet of the unsayable. One would hardly expect it, given his singing things in their democratic

equality, finding words for all, no matter how common. His verse is so full of the abundant saying of things, of the articulation of the whole range of the sayable throughout the visible, tangible universe, that the remarkable extent to which he is also a poet of the unsayable has not been particularly noticeable. Nevertheless, it is clearly expressed in moments of darkness and silence, even at the core of the *Song of Myself*. And it turns up explicitly as the leading theme in his poem "A Clear Midnight":

> THIS is thy hour O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless,
> Away from books, away from art, the day erased, the lesson done,
> Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing, pondering the themes thou lovest best.
> Night, sleep, and the stars. (*Leaves of Grass*, poem 383)[43]

This is the burden of a certain mysticism that does not articulate things in their essential being so much as evoke them in their impenetrable mystery. Shifts of perspectives through a European historicist analysis, and especially through religious-cultural lenses, serve to refocus this poetic corpus and to bring some of its generally overlooked meanings to light. Of course, the prophetic emphasis is not unprecedented or even undeveloped in American readings, and the contamination between European and American culture is in any case pervasive. But a different angle of approach, nevertheless, changes our overall picture of this poet.

Bernadette Malinowski reads Whitman's poetry as the fulfillment of an eschatological promise. His performative use of language, reaching out beyond the boundaries of the text in a direct embrace of the reader, is a prophetic word that enacts what it announces. Like the Word of God, it creates and makes real what it proclaims and poetically depicts. This is what Malinowski understands Whitman to mean by the phrase "Wording the future," which occurs in a letter he wrote to Emerson (August 1856). Malinowski shows the extent to which the whole apparatus of prophetic poetry, from antiquity through Dante and Klopstock to Blake and Shelley, is present and active even in this modern American poet celebrating new beginnings with his radical individualism and grass-roots democracy.

Whitman's writing adopts an artistically apophatic mode that stands for more than can simply be said. The ineffability topos at the end of the *Song of Myself* emerges as the key to this reading. In fact, Whitman ends by telling his reader: "I too am untranslatable" (section 52). And yet, self-abandon to the Other is performed through an invocation of the reader,

to whom the poet's own breath and pulse are transferred programmatically in the *envoi* to Whitman's collected poems, *Leaves of Grass*. In "So Long," Whitman steps out of the cadre of the literary altogether to embrace his reader bodily:

> My songs cease, I abandon them,
> From behind the screen where I hid I advance personally solely to you.
>
> Camerado, this is no book,
> Who touches this touches a man,
> (Is it night? are we here together alone?)
> It is you I hold and who holds you,
> I spring from the pages into your arms – decease calls me forth. (lines 51–57)

It is only in fusional identity with the reader that the poet lives on. In closing the *Song* itself, the poet advises:

> I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
> If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles. (section 52)

This is the constant challenge for us: to become more than what we are at present through opening ourselves to constitutively transforming relationships with others. My purpose here has been to give a philosophical interpretation of the idea of world literature. However, this notion's most persuasive verification is finally more literary than philosophical, and for that reason and in that spirit, I conclude not with philosophical propositions but with this exegetical example. In so doing, I return to the practice of criticism as I understand it to have been made possible by the (non-) horizon—or rather the broken-open horizon—of world literature.

References

1. This paper was originally composed for and presented (in part) at an International Summit Dialogue and Forum on World Literature ("What Is World Literature? Tension between the Local and the Universal") hosted by Beijing Normal University in October 2015. I thank Professors Fang Weigui and Karl-Heinz Pohl for this invitation.
2. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Longxi Zhang, *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

3. Laozi, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D. C. Lau (New York: Penguin Books, 1963). Chinese text in James Legge, *The Texts of Taoism*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891/ London: Humphry Milford, 1891). Available online: http://ctext.org/dao-de-jing.
4. Walter Benjamin, “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,“*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. IV/1, 9–21 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 9–21, trans. Harry Zohn, “The Task of the Translator,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 69–82. I translate, however, directly from the German.
5. Cf. further Paul de Man, “‘Conclusions’: Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator,’” *The Resistance to Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 87.
6. Zhang is quoted from the conference manual “What Is World Literature? Tension between the Local and the Universal: An International Summit Dialogue and Forum, School of Chinese Language and Literature,” Beijing Normal University, October 16–17, 2015, 5. I am responding also to his books as cited below. Most recently, he treats the subject in the four concluding chapters of *From Comparison to World Literature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015).
7. See *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, Chris Boesel and Catherine Keller, eds. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).
8. Cf. Amador Vega, *Arte y santidad. Cuatro lecciones de estética apofática* (Pamplona: Universidad Pública de Navarra, 2005), or in summary form, Vega, “Estética apofática y hermenéutica del misterio: elementos para una crítica de la visibilidad,” *Diánoia* 54, no. 62 (2009): 1–25.
9. Maurice Blanchot, “La littérature et le droit à la mort,” *Part du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), trans. as “Literature and the Right to Death,” in *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays by Maurice Blanchot*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (Barrytown, N. Y.: Station Hill Press, 1981).
10. Marcel Gauchet, *Le désenchantement du monde: Une histoire politique de la religion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).
11. Longxi Zhang, *Allegoresis: Reading Canonical Literature East and West* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 11.
12. *Zhuangzi*, end of chapter 22, trans. Victor Mair (New York: Bantam, 1994), 222.
13. This image is pivotal in the *Zhuangzi*, for example, in 2:16 in *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Brook Ziporyn (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009).
14. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 5.

15. Damrosch here picks up on the provocative suggestions of Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 54–68 and "More Conjectures," *New Left Review* 20 (2003). Reprinted in *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013).
16. This is likewise the leading *chef d'accusation* of Jean-François Billeter against François Jullien's exoticization of China in his *Contre François Jullien* (Paris: Éditions Allia, 2006).
17. Freedom is so understood by a certain strand of apophatic tradition summed up in classics like Pico de la Mirandola's *De dignitate homini oratio* (1486) and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's *Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809).
18. Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (*L'Être et le néant,* 1943) works this out in phenomenological detail keyed to a rich repertoire of experiences of human relationality and informed throughout by a keen literary sensibility.
19. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) and *Philosophy in the Flesh: Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
20. Edward Slingerland, *What Science Offers the Humanities: Integrating Body and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
21. Marcel Danesi, *Lingua, metafora, concetto. Vico e la linguistica cognitiva* (Bari: Edizioni dal Sud, 2001). In English, see Marcel Danesi, *Vico, Metaphor, and the Origin of Language* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1993).
22. Robert Neville, in *The Tao and the Daimon: Segments of a Religious Inquiry* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 112–13, appeals to Charles Sanders Peirce's notion of a "vague hypothesis" in order to resolve apparently conflicting religious claims.
23. See Jan Assmann, "Translating Gods: Religion as a Factor of Cultural (Un)Translatability," 24–36, and Sanford Budick, "Crises of Alterity: Cultural Untranslatability and the Experience of Secondary Otherness," 1–24, both in *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between,* eds. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). More generally, see Gadamer, "Vom Wort zum Begriff: Die Aufgabe der Hermeneutik als Philosophie," in Jean Grondin, ed. *Gadamer Lesebuch* (Stuttgart: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 100–110.
24. William Franke, "Nothingness and the Aspiration to Universality in the Poetic 'Making' of Sense: An Essay in Comparative East-West Poetics," *Asian Philosophy: An International Journal of the Philosophical Traditions of the East* 26/3 (2016): 1–24.
25. See especially Levinas's *Autrement qu'être et au de-là de l'essence* (1974), translated as *Otherwise than Being and Beyond Essence*.

26. In this regard, an important complement to Benjamin's essay on "The Task of the Translator" ("Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers") is his companion essay "Über die Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen" (1916), in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), vol. 2, pt. 1, 140–157, trans. Edmund Jephcott, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 314–332.
27. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* 5.
28. The issue is debated from various angles of approach, and my position is staked out, in *Transcendence, Immanence, and Intercultural Philosophy,* ed. Nahum Brown and William Franke (London: Palgrave, 2016).
29. Much current discussion of the historical emergence of the transcendent and universal ideals in the "Axial Age," baptized as such by Karl Jaspers (*Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, 1949), is gathered in Robert N. Bellah and Hans Joas, eds., *The Axial Age and Its Consequences* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).
30. Maurice Blanchot, *L'espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955).
31. *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts*, 2 vols. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); *A Philosophy of the Unsayable* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014).
32. *Apophatic Paths from Europe to China: Regions without Borders* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018).
33. Compare Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964) on the distinctiveness of a literary way of thinking through desire, particularly chapter 1: "The Motive for Metaphor."
34. Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 23 and chapter 3.
35. See David Burrell, "The Christian Distinction Celebrated and Expanded," in *The Truthful and the Good: Essays in Honor of Robert Sokolowski,* ed. John R. Drummond and James G. Hart. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996), 191–206.
36. A fascinating exposition of the theological logic of incommensurability or "transcendence" is worked out by Ingolf U. Dalferth in *Transzendenz und säkulare Welt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2015).
37. Cf. Hegel's remark on limits in *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1970), "Einleitung," 70.
38. "Jene reine Sprache, die in fremde gebannt ist, in der eigenen zu erlösen, die im Werk gefangene in der Umdichtung zu befreien, ist die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" (19).
39. "Die wahre Übersetzung ist durchscheinend, sie verdeckt nicht das Original, steht ihm nicht im Licht, sondern läßt die reine Sprache, wie verstärkt durch ihr eigenes Medium, nur um so voller aufs Original fallen" ("Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers," 18).

40. Proposition 6 of the title essay "Perché leggere i classici" of Calvino's *Perché leggere i classici* (Milan: Mondadori, 1991), translated in *The Uses of Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986).
41. See Whitman's essay "The Bible as Poetry" (1883), as well as his manifesto "Democratic Vistas" (1871), and see Johann Georg Hamann's "Aesthetica in nuce," in *Schriften zur Sprache*, ed. J. Simon (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1967), 105.
42. See particularly Bernadette Malinowski, *"Das Heilige sei mein Wort": Paradigmen prophetischer Dichtung von Klopstock bis Whitman* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2002), 401–403.
43. *Leaves of Grass, final "Death-Bed" edition, 1891–92* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1892) available online: http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174745.



CHAPTER 6

Some Remarks on the Concept of World Literature After 2000

Marián Gálik

In 2000, at the International Conference entitled "Concepts of World Literature in the Age of Globalization" in Bratislava, I read a lecture nearly of the same title as this chapter: "Some Remarks on the Concept of World Literature in 2000."[1] Among the well-known literary comparatists present there, I mention Douwe W. Fokkema, Armando Gnisci and Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková. Most of them were the representatives from Central European countries and the former Soviet Union.

The paper in 2000 followed my musings, "Some Remarks on the Concept of World Literature from Goethe to Ďurišin," written on the occasion of J.W. Goethe's 250th and D. Ďurišin's 70th birthdays.[2] In this paper, I tried to analyze briefly the different views of Western scholars, including those from Central and Eastern Europe, concerning the formulation of world literature from 1827 up to the 1980s. In "Some Remarks on the Concept of World Literature in 2000," I followed Ďurišin's concept or conceptions of world literature, the "trinomial" vision that was most common among scholars and that saw:

M. Gálik (✉)
Institute of Oriental Studies, Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Bratislava, Slovakia

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_6

1. World literature as the literature of the whole world and thus the history of world literature as an ensemble.
2. World literature as a selection of the best created by the individual national (or single) literatures; this is also termed classical literature, the literature of the classics.
3. World literature as the products, in some way mutually connected or alike, of all the individual literatures.[3]

As to the last concept, Ďurišin pointed in his book *Čo je svetová literatúra?* (*What Is World Literature?*), published in 1992, to the processuality of world literature as the ultimate literary and historical unit or entity, which emerges as the outcome of genetic-contact relations, typological affinities (parallels) and interliterary communities (or commonwealths). World literature as an entity depends on our knowledge of literary and interliterary process. It is not a constant phenomenon, but on the contrary "it is subordinated to permanent modification and inner restructuring,"[4] mostly within the development of literature itself and literary scholarship. New attempts to define the concept of world literature are relevant and needed. An exhaustive definition of world literature is not possible. Its existence would be possible only due to the preliminary knowledge of literary facts and processes, since literature is the product of everlasting development.

Ďurišin's book was the first swallow in the history of comparative literature. In my paper in 2000, I tried to inform interested readers about the studies from the 1980s and 1990s, beginning with H. Steinmetz's "Weltliteratur, Umriss eines literaturgeschichtlichen Konzepts" from 1988, and ending with the collection edited by M. Schmelling, *Weltliteratur heute. Konzepte und Perspektiven*, from 1995. Some studies by Z. Konstantinović, C. Clüver, G. M. Vajda and H. H. H. Remak are also briefly analyzed there. I suppose that few scholars outside the Slavic countries were aware of Ďurišin's book, and it was hardly read except by César Domínguez[5] from Spain. As far as I know, only one short review in French has been published about it in the West, by Eva Le Grand, a Canadian comparatist of Czech origin.[6] Western readers might be acquainted with the book on the basis of a relatively long abstract on pages 196–204, but it seems to me that they never used or could not use this opportunity.

1

The second great contribution to the notion of world literature was published more than 10 years later by David Damrosch with the same title as Ďurišin's book, only in English: *What Is World Literature?*[7] During our meeting at the 19th Congress of the ICLA in Seoul (August 15–21, 2010), Damrosch told me that he was informed about Ďurišin's theory of comparative literature, but I did not find any trace of it in his works that I have read so far. Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* consists of nine studies, an "Introduction" beginning with Goethe, and it ends with a conclusion entitled "World Enough and Time." This one is more theoretical than other parts, resembling Ďurišin's concept of world literature when proposing a "threefold definition focused on the world, the text, and the reader:

1. World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures.
2. World literature is writing that gains in translation.
3. World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading; a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our place and time."[8]

Elliptical refraction is a quasi-astronomical concept, but it adequately expresses the restructuring of data coming from the different single literatures to the target literary structures. Here Damrosch's idea is similar to the second trinomial vision of Ďurišin. Damrosch's third definition is very similar to Ďurišin's more theoretical view that world literature is a product (or consists of products), in some way mutually connected, or alike, of all single literatures, as well as to Ďurišin's interliterary communities (commonwealths).[9] In contrast to Damrosch, Ďurišin does not accentuate the importance of translations for comparative and world literature so much, but ponders their place in the study of the interliterary process.[10] Although quite a lot was written about world literature before the 1990s, world literature was not the center of attention. In *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, edited by Charles Bernheimer, we read about the "ways of contextualizing literature in the expanded fields of discourse, culture, ideology, race and gender [that] are so different from the old models of literary study according to authors, nations, periods, and genres, that the term 'literature' may no longer adequately describe our object of study."[11] Remak, who first opened Pandora's box with his definition of

comparative literature,[12] could not foresee the invasion of the often shallow cultural studies in this domain, and Harold Bloom even wrote that in the decade since about 1985, literary studies had been flooded "by the garbage called cultural criticism."[13] In 1993, Susan Bassnett pronounced that comparative literature "has had its day" and "we should look upon translation studies as the principal discipline from now on, with comparative literature as a valued but subsidiary subject area."[14] There were overwhelming numbers of translation studies in the next few years in China too, and Bassnett's "The Translation Turn in Cultural Studies" from 2001 was well received by the leading Chinese translatologist Xie Tianzhen 谢天振 in his paper read at the 9th Congress of the CCLA (Chinese Comparative Literature Association) in Peking in 2008.[15]

After 2000, there was much more interest in the problems of world literature than in the previous century. World literature is a much vaguer concept than comparative literature. In the last years of his life, Ďurišin claimed that world literature is a historical and therefore changing phenomenon: "It changes from epoch to epoch, from literature to literature, from reader to reader."[16] New and newer attempts to define the concept of comparative literature are proofs of the fact that "[a]n exhaustive and permanently valid definition of World Literature is practically impossible. If it existed, it would be built on the preliminary results of our knowledge of literary processes and therefore it would be only a closed and dead system."[17]

In *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*,[18] edited by Haun Saussy, World Literature, world literature, world-literature, world literatures, *Weltliteratur*, global comparatism and the like are discussed many times in the studies written by Damrosch, Emily Apter, David Ferris, Cathy Trumpener and Roland Greene. The first and third parts of Damrosch's threefold definition (an elliptical refraction of national literatures, and not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading) are quoted in the contribution "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares; *Of Memes, Hives, and Selfish Genes*" by the editor, and thus he probably agrees with Damrosch's view. Saussy does not mention the last part of Damrosch's assertion that world literature is "a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time."[19] The Slovak comparatist Anton Pokrivčák points to the same threefold definition and also to three different earlier conceptions of world literature, similar to that of Ďurišin mentioned earlier. According to Pokrivčák's understanding of Damrosch's text, world literature "is not a stable group of works, either a set of classics,

masterpieces, or multiple windows, but a dynamic conception allowing 'all three categories their ongoing value.'"[20] If Damrosch is an excellent scholar, probably without equal among Westerners in giving exquisite examples from the different literatures of the world, beginning with *Gilgamesh* up to the present, Ďurišin's systemic theory of interliterary process and approach to world literature is more theoretical, one may say literary and philosophical. According to César Domínguez, it is surprising that "proponents of the 'new' systematic approach to world literature that has recently re-emerged in the USA, namely Franco Moretti, Andrew Milner (2004), Alexander Beecroft (2008), and Emily Apter (2009), never mention Ďurišin."[21] Not only these scholars but even other American members of academe ceased to pay attention to Ďurišin after he published two books in German and English: *Vergleichende Literaturforschung. Versuch eines methodisch-theoretischen Grundrisses*[22] and *Sources and Systematics of Comparative Literature.*[23]

The first to "discover" Ďurišin was René Wellek who, in his letter of October 24, 1967, shortly after the publication of Ďurišin's first theoretical book, wrote the following: "I liked *Problémy literárnej komparatistiky* (*Problems of Comparative Literature*) because of its scheme and standpoints." Fokkema was the second to devote much attention to Ďurišin's literary and critical views in relation to the so-called *interlittéraire*, which was not used as yet at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s. Fokkema certainly did not hear Ďurišin's lecture at the VIth Congress of AILC/ICLA in Bordeaux, from August 31 to September 5, 1970, since their papers were read at the same time, but the new term—before that, *trans-cultural* was normally used—began to interest him.[24] In one of his discussions with me he said that Ďurišin's views influenced him a lot. In one of his papers, "Method and Programme of Comparative Literature," read in Romania, he compared the significance of Wellek's famous study "The Crisis of Comparative Literature" to the two books by Ďurišin just mentioned.[25] It is difficult to say which of Ďurišin's several books, later characterized by Ulrich Weisstein as his *magnum opus*,[26] had the greater impact on Fokkema, but it was probably *Sources and Systematics*, because in it Ďurišin pointed out three sources for his systematics: studies by A.N. Veselovsky's historical poetics, Russian Formalists and Czech Structuralism. William Tay (Zheng Shusen 郑树森), an American scholar of Chinese origin, in his book *Wenxue lilun and bijiao wenxue* (文学理论与比较文学, *Literary Theory and Comparative Literature*), was indebted mainly to *Sources and Systematics*, and after reading material I sent him, he

extolled Ďurišin as the best theoretician of comparative literature together with Douwe Fokkema and Claudio Guillén. Domínguez cites Guillén's high evaluation of Ďurišin's contribution in his *chef d'œuvre The Challenge of Comparative Literature* as "one of the best presentations of our discipline."[27] Such exceptions among American scholars are few. Apart from those mentioned here, as far as I know at least two should be mentioned: H.H.H. Remak and Earl Miner. Remak showed high appreciation of Ďurišin's contribution at least two times. The first was in 1974 at a Symposium in the Literary Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, following the meeting of the Board of the International Comparative Literature Association that took place on March 1–3, 1975, where he said that "Ďurišin's classification of the term 'World Literature' is well differentiated and balanced"[28] and where he expressed a great respect for the recent works on the discipline of Comparative Literature written by Dr. Ďurišin, notably his *Vergleichende Literaturforschung* and *Sources and Systematics of Comparative Literature*.[29] The second time was during our common discussion at the IXth Congress of AILC/ICLA in Innsbruck, Austria, on August 20–24, 1979. Earl Miner was probably the last American comparatist who, in his essay "Possible Canons of Literary Transmittal and Appropriation," expressed his regret that Western comparatists did not pay enough attention to Ďurišin's English book, especially to the question of transmission and the appropriation, reception and impact of the text in target literary systems.[30] Miner supposed that it was probably due to the "woody translation." But this was certainly not the only reason. In any case, Ďurišin's contribution to the discipline was "unjustly rejected" by the Americans.[31]

Domínguez is right when he asserts that the attitude of Canadian scholars was different. He mentions Milan V. Dimić, Eva Kushner and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, but without proof.[32] It is possible to believe him, but there could also be other cases he does not mention. All three had their roots or even lived in Central and Southern European countries and could understand the ways Ďurišin had to write, in order to be accepted by the political establishment and in order to publish and be present at international conferences, including the AILC/ICLA Congresses. Ulrich Weisstein asserts that the reason for the "unjust rejection" of Ďurišin's contribution was his "Marxist" orientation, and an insufficiently free and broad interdisciplinary approach.[33] As to the first, since I knew him very well, I have to say that he accepted it as the *bi shang Liangshan* 逼上梁山, although he was quite critical of it in his personal opinion. As to the

second, he was not against the study of literature with other phenomena of social consciousness, but against the "marriage" of comparative literature with the study of culture, as was the case in the second half of the 1980s and later. In the German-speaking world, sympathy towards Ďurišin's theory was expressed by Gerhard R. Kaiser in his book *Einführung in die vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft: Forschungsstand, Kritik, Aufgaben* from 1980; Peter Zima, in his book *Komparatistik* (Tübingen 1992), pointed to the impact of the "small literatures" on Ďurišin's theory of interliterary communities.[34] This is, of course, not quite the best solution to the problem. After receiving Ďurišin's book *Theory of Interliterary Process* in 1988, Tania Franco Carvalhal, from Universidad Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, wrote me that the book was a "great contribution" for her.[35]

In China, the first to write about Ďurišin were two colleagues from Shanghai International Studies University: Xie Tianzhen 谢天振, who published an essay under the pseudonym Xia Jing 夏景, "Dongou bijiao wenxue yanjiu shuping 东欧比较文学研究述评, A Review of the Research in Comparative Literature in Eastern Europe,"[36] and Liao Hongjun 廖鸿钧, who translated Ďurišin's Russian version of his first book on comparative literature into Chinese, a translation which for reasons unknown to me never appeared. Xie Tianzhen also wrote a short profile of Ďurišin for *Zhongxi bijiao wenxue shouce* 中西比较文学手册, *A Handbook for Sino-Western Comparative Literature*.[37] Indian comparatist Gubhagarat Singh highlighted the contribution of Ďurišin in overcoming the shortcomings of the French School of comparative literature.[38]

2

The "unjust rejection" of Ďurišin's contribution by American scholars after 1990 was probably, as Domínguez claims in his essay, caused by their negative attitude to the seemingly Marxist orientation of his assertions and his close cooperation with partners from the Soviet Union and Central European socialist countries. It is possible to agree with the opinions of L. Ruffel and A. Eppelborn, in *Où est la literature mondiale?*, edited by Ch. Pradeau and T. Samoyault: Where no full academic freedom exists, it is necessary to look for what is expressed beyond the actual words in scholarly works.

The systemic approach to comparative literature and to world literature in Ďurišin's work has been influenced by an essay by his older colleague from the Institute of Philosophy of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Vojtech

Filkorn, entitled "Veda a jej metóda" (Science and Its Method) from 1971 and by Filkorn's older monograph, *Metóda vedy* (*The Method of Science*) from 1956. According to Ďurišin, the "concept of world literature *is conceived as a system* (my emphasis) and includes only those literary phenomena which are connected in a certain way [according to my terminology – genetic-contactually and typologically] and thus create a certain unity […]" In relation to the natural system,[39] existing independently of our perception, it is distinguished merely by a certain degree of completeness and exactitude. The relationship between world literature and the concepts of world literature as systems of thought is variable and expresses the dialectic tension of the gnoseological endeavor to master an objectively given reality and to approach it as closely as possible […] In the course of history, the existing concepts of world literature are in this sense relative, which follows from the most fundamental gnoseological laws, from the existence of absolute and relative truth.[40] World Literature is thus not an unchangeable phenomenon. It is subject to continual modification and reconstruction on the basis of new knowledge of literary facts through history.[41]

And now back to American and other theoreticians of world literature. The first of them is Franco Moretti with his essay "Conjectures on World Literature," published at the beginning of 2000. It is written on the basis of his reception of the well-known scholars of systemic research, Max Weber, Marc Bloch, Immanuel Wallerstein,[42] Fernand Braudel,[43] and maybe most of all under the impact of Itamar Even-Zohar's "Laws of Literary Interference."[44] In spite of the American enthusiasm for close reading, Moretti emphasized distant reading, directly using the words *without a single direct textual reading*. Distant reading, according to him, *is a condition of knowledge*. This kind of reading allows us to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems. Moretti did not try to inform his readers about his vision or "definition," whether singular or plural, of world literature; he only presented his "conjectures" about how we may understand literature (and also world literature), mostly looking for it at a *distance from the text*, smaller or larger, and mentioning devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems. His essay is about novels from "peripheries": Latin America, Arab lands, Turkey, China, Japan and West Africa. In Moretti's second essay "Evolution, World-Systems, *Weltliteratur*,"[45] great attention is paid to the novel, as in his "conjectures." At the beginning, he claims that although the term world literature "has been around for almost two centuries, we do not yet have a genuine theory of the object – however

loosely defined – to which it refers. We have no set of concepts, no hypotheses to organize the immense quantity of data that constitute world literature. We do not *know* what world literature is."[46] Then using the evolutionary theory of Darwin and his followers and modern world-system analysis, he will at the end "outline the new image of *Weltliteratur* that emerges from their encounter."[47] According to him there are two distinct world literatures: one before the eighteenth century as a "mosaic of separate 'local' cultures" which could be explained by evolutionary theory, and the second which he prefers to call the world literary system, unified by the international literary market, which could be best explained by some versions of world-system analysis. World literature, or perhaps it is better to say world literatures, is a "large topic that deserves a study of its own."[48] But there is no reply to the given problem.

Alexander Beecroft proposes no conjectures, but he tries to prove the meaning of world literature without the hyphen necessary in "world-system" or "world systems" as an "adjective modifying that noun, with a hyphen marking the distinction."[49] His essay was an answer to Moretti and to another work of a similar character, Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters*, translated into English in 2007, a year before Beecroft's essay. As for Moretti and Casanova, his authorities are Braudel and Wallerstein and their *économie-monde* or "world-system," and according to him "world-literature [...] is not the sum total of the world's literary production, but rather a world-system within which literature is produced and circulates."[50] I do not think that if we want to try to define world literature for our time and understanding, we need just the world-systems analysis (Wallerstein) or that of politico-economic systems of power (Casanova). Literature has its own system and world literature its own place within it, as I tried to show on the basis of Ďurišin's text in notes 39, 40 and 41. According to Beecroft, Moretti is too dependent on his knowledge of novels, but novels are only a part of the system of literature, and Casanova's *république mondiale des lettres* has its chronological and spatial limits. Beecroft came up with the idea of six modes of literary production in which the *epichoric* is produced within the confines of a local community and he mentions, among others, Feng 风 Airs from *Shijing* 诗经 *Book of Poetry*; *panchoric* are works like the Homeric epic or Sanskrit epic, which had much broader spheres of operation; and *cosmopolitan* literature is such literary works as Sanskrit poetry in South-East Asia, Akkadian and Greek in the Eastern Mediterranean, old Chinese literature in the Far East, and Latin literature in the European Middle Ages. *Vernacular* literatures

resemble the *panchoric*, but are produced in comparatively large territories and using the same language, like the Italian literature of Dante's era or the literature of May Fourth in China. Beecroft does not like the term *national* literature and it is possible to agree with him. In any case, it is understandable because his essay was written at the time when the European Union was expanding its borders and in view of the contemporary situation in global capitalism. Probably it would be better to use the term ethnic literature instead, for the smallest units, the nationality literatures, like those in China. *Global* literature is that of global capitalism, although Beecroft does not indicate clearly the *terminus a quo*. It transcends national, continental borders and he does not try to define its borders, although he says that it embraces all verbal art including the cinematic. He proposes, although not clearly enough, sharing work with specialists in Persian literature and in Sinology (he could do just the same among the American Sinologists and Chinese scholars, as is the case in our Summit Dialogue and Forum), which could be a good and useful idea. I do not understand why such a way of doing things should bring us to the unhyphenated world literature. Why is a hyphen necessary between world and literature? But I agree with him that when trying to define world literature, it is enough to look at it as a part of a literary system, as "the literature – the verbal artistic production – of the world."[51]

3

From the many studies on world literature that appeared in the first 15 years of the twenty-first century, we shall mention and briefly evaluate only some which appeared in the last few years and are not connected with Braudel and Wallerstein. David Damrosch in his "Comparative World Literature" does not follow these theories. In the abstract, he claims that "world literature can be considered to be the sum total of the world's literatures from every period of writing."[52] This is the same as the first part of his threefold definition: "World literature as an elliptical refraction of national literatures" and the first part of Ďurišin's trinomial vision: "World Literature is the literature of the whole world." If Damrosch believes in his first definition, Ďurišin certainly does not. He presents only the view of many others. It is a positive trait of Damrosch that he is against the centripetal strains of Euro-American comparatists of earlier times and proposes to do much for the centrifugal tendencies. He encourages his American colleagues at least to enlarge their horizons "to take far fuller account of the varieties of comparatist practice around the world."[53] His examples are

from India and China, but he could, if his paper were longer, do the same for other countries as well, although it seems that the literatures of India and China are of particular interest to him. I am indebted to him, in that he mentioned the reception of my essay on Rainer Maria Rilke in China, even though without mentioning my name. The Romanian scholar Oana Fotache, in "'Global Literature' – In Search of a Definition" from the same book, tries to define "global literature" especially from the past two decades. She concedes that formerly the field of literary study was not "'literary globalization' or 'global literature' but, interestingly enough, 'world' or 'comparative literature.'"[54] Her understanding of global literature is similar to that of Damrosch's comparative literature of the last decades. Another young Romanian scholar, Andrei Terian, in his essay "Reading World Literature: Elliptical or Hyperbolic? The Case of Second-World National Literature," offers above all a criticism of Damrosch's views on world literature, and expresses his dissatisfaction with the neglect of second-world national literatures produced in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe under Soviet influence after World War II. He supposes that Damrosch's "threefold definition" is "not so much a *methodological guideline* needed in order to better differentiate 'world literature' from works with a strictly local or national value, as rather a '*justification of his own reading practices.*"[55] This is excessively harsh criticism. The "threefold definition," slightly differently formulated, has been known at least since the 1950s, if not earlier.[56] The difference between Damrosch and Ďurišin is that the first allows all three interpretations, but the second, together with Frank Wollman, only the third one.[57] It is possible to agree with Terian that elliptical refraction could be read as a "hyperbola" (similar to a geometrical form, the center of which is empty), but not with his idea that the works of the post-communist era could not be accepted among the great works of Western literatures or among those which belong to the post-colonialist literatures. It is true that Western scholars do not know the works written by some excellent writers from Central and Eastern European countries well enough. Some of them might be regarded as works of world literature. I have in mind *Dr. Zhivago* by Boris Pasternak, *The Gulag Archipelago* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Closely Observed Trains* or *I Served the King of England* by Bohumil Hrabal or *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by another Czech writer, Milan Kundera. It is difficult to say that Romanian literature "is simply a minor literature."[58] The problem is that it is literature written in a language that is not one of the "world languages" and therefore not known enough, and its works are not studied enough from the perspectives of comparative literature.

4

In the invitation to this international Summit dialogue and Forum we read: "The rise of World Literature today may be seen as a response to the crisis in literary studies. In the context of rapid globalization, such a paradigmatic shift is not only a tendency in the internal development of literary studies and an answer to a teaching need in the institutions of higher education, but it is also a humanistic response to the increasingly intense racial, class, and cultural conflicts we witness in the world today." This is the first part of the message sent to the "fifteen distinguished Chinese and foreign scholars including two interlocutors: Professors David Damrosch and Zhang Longxi 张隆溪." The second part of this message is as follows: "In this sense, then, how to define and understand World Literature becomes a part of the process of finding an indispensable conceptual horizon for seeking a new world order and a new structure of civilizations." If we may agree with the first part, then the second part is very problematic. Literature, like art, is not a means that could change our world or our civilization. The study of world literature within comparative literature may only deepen our knowledge within their proper fields and help us to understand more what outstanding and admirable work has been done in this important part of the social consciousness of humankind in the different parts of the world throughout history, at least since *Gilgamesh*, the Homeric epics and the Bible up to our own days.

Where Chinese literature is concerned—and just this will probably (?) be the most important issue of the meeting—we may agree with Wang Ning 王宁, who in 2002 in his contribution to the 7th Triennial Conference of the Chinese Comparative Association and the International Conference, Nanking, August 15–18, wrote the following: "For a longer period of time, in the field of Chinese–Western comparative literature studies, we domestic scholars have tried to research how Chinese literature, especially in the modern period, was influenced by foreign cultural trends and literary doctrines. They seldom researched or could not find the sources to do research on how Chinese literature was translated and introduced abroad and how it was received by Western Sinologists and general readers."[59] According to my insufficient knowledge, Professor Yue Daiyun's 乐黛云 book *Guowai Lu Xun yanjiu lunji (1960–1981)* 国外鲁迅研究论集（1960–1981）*Lu Xun's Studies Abroad (1960–1980)*[60] was probably the first of its kind, and a little later we have *Zou xiang shijie wenxue: Zhongguo xiandai zuojia yu waiguo wenxue* 走向世界文学：中国现代作家与外国文学 *To World*

Literature: Modern Chinese Men of Letters and Foreign Literature, edited by Zeng Xiaoyi 曾小逸.[61] After 20 or more years, the situation is different and the great progress in the Chinese economy and the opening up to the globalized world have also brought changes in the field of literature. Step by step the Chinese also searched for ways not only to join the modern nations of the contemporary world, but also to persuade especially their Euro-American colleagues that the works of Chinese literature, ancient and modern, or at least the best works, may aspire to be acknowledged as jewels of world literature.

Wang Ning was an initiator and partly a chairman in two sessions at the IXth and Xth CCLA Congresses (Peking 2008 and Shanghai 2011), where editors of international and Chinese journals of comparative literature met and discussed problems of the discipline. Among those present were Thomas Beebee, editor of *Comparative Literary Studies*, which later, in 2012, published a special issue, *Modern China and the World: Literary Constructions*, with Liu Kang 刘康 and Wang Ning as guest editors, and Peter Hajdu, managing editor of the Hungarian journal *Neohelicon*, where *Modern Chinese Fiction in Global Context*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2010 (edited by Wang Ning) and *Comparative Literature: Toward a (Re)construction of World Literature*, Vol. 38, No. 2. 2011 (ibid.) were published. There are some essays on world literature, among them Damrosch's "Comparative World Literature: China and U.S.," in the Proceedings of the IXth CCLA Congress *Duoyuan wenhua hudong zhongde wenxue duihua* 多元文化互动中的文学对话 *Literary Dialogues in the Context of Multicultural Interactions*, where the title of Damrosch's essay is misleading, since not only China but also India is discussed.[62] In the proceedings of the two congresses of the CCLA just mentioned, there are also other papers concerned with world literature. We shall mention here the names of the authors: Fang Hanwen 方汉文 (two essays), Yue Feng 岳峰, Cha Mingjian 查明建, Gao Xudong and Wang Hongtu 王宏图. In another important publication, *Kuawenhua yanjiu: shenmo shi bijiao wenxue* 跨文化研究:什么是比较文学 *A Crosscultural Study: What Is Comparative Literature?*, there are two studies by Yan Shaodang 严绍璗 and once again Wang Hongtu,[63] and in the newly revived journal *Cowrie,* No. 11–12, 2014, dedicated to the late Professor Sun Jingyao 孙景尧, there is another essay by Wang Ning.

Wang Ning also read one featuring lecture at the XIth CCLA Congress (Yanbian 2014) entitled "Shijie wenxue yu Zhongguo dangdai wenxue" 世界文学与中国当代文学 "World Literature and Chinese Contemporary

Literature," and Professor Wang Jiezhi 汪介之 began the first session: History of Chinese Comparative Literature, Its Present Stage and Future, with the paper "Zhongguo bijiao wenxue de weilai: zou xiang shijie wenxue" 中国比较文学的未来:走向是世界文学 "The Future of Chinese Comparative Literature: Towards World Literature."[64] Wang Jiezhi's call is very similar to that of Zeng Xiaoyi from 1985. Coming about 30 years later, this call reminds me of the *nahan* 呐喊 call to arms by Lu Xun in a completely different atmosphere. In Lu Xun's musings written for the first book of his short stories, we read about an iron house "having not a single window, and virtually indestructible, in which there are many people soundly asleep who are about to die of suffocation." China has changed very much since 1919 and yet in the last few years it does have enough strength to "call to arms" its scholars, to compete with the most developed country in the world in the field of the humanities, namely the United States of America. The Fifth Meeting of the Sino-American Bilateral Symposium on Comparative Literature in Shanghai in 2010[65] and the five summer sessions of the World Literature Association and the Institute of World Literature from 2011 to 2015, beginning in Peking and ending up to now in Lisbon, are proof of this.[66] The close cooperation between American and PRC comparatists began at the First Sino-American Comparative Literature Symposium in Peking, August 1983, with Earl Miner and Qian Zhongshu 钱锺书 as the most prominent participants. Earl Miner was an author of the "Foreword" to the Proceedings of the Second Sino-American Comparative Literature Symposium in 1987 with the title "Literatures, Histories and Literary Histories," co-edited by Yang Zhouhan and Yue Daiyun, but there no world literature was mentioned.[67]

Nowadays it seems to be the age of world literature, after the death of comparative literature and following the translation turn or *Fieber.* The problem is *for how long*, and *what* world literature means. Wang Hongtu was right when he entitled his essay "'Shijie wenxue' de shi shi fei fei" 世界文学的是是非非 "What Is 'World Literature' and What Is Not?" Probably he had Xunzi's 荀子 (fl. 298–238 BC) maxim in mind: "Shi shi fei fei wei zhi zhi" 是是非非谓之知 "To know that right is right and that wrong is wrong is wisdom."[68] It is very difficult to say who is right or wrong and what is right and wrong with world literature. Especially during the world literature *Fieber*, inclusive of and after 2000, at least some parts of the six conceptions mentioned by Ďurišin and Damrosch were accepted *cum grano salis* by many, and more importantly they were understood differently.

Haun Saussy, in his essay "Comparisons, World Literature, and the Common Denominator," came up with an excellent idea to try to find a "common denominator" when trying to define world literature, or its authors or their works. From high school all of us have some experience with the common denominator in mathematics. One of its definitions is as follows: "a number that is a multiple of all denominators of a set of fractions."[69] Saussy himself brings an example from Aristotle's "cup of Ares."[70] According to him: "World literature would thus be the discovery of a common denominator that was there all along – an analytically and necessarily true statement that brings us new knowledge only to the degree that it redirects our attention. This is of course an enterprise worth pursuing, since attention always needs to be redirected; the great enemy of truth may not be error, but myopia or distraction."[71] In order to understand world literature, a needed "common denominator" is not indicated by Saussy and neither has a *tertium comparationis* been found. Should it be searched for?

Ďurišin, in his book *Teória literárnej komparatistiky* from 1975,[72] finished in 1973 and translated into English as *Theory of Literary Comparatistics* in 1984,[73] also claims the necessity of a "common denominator," not of a "common factor" as we read in the not very good English translation, and that in comparative literature the "starting points should be "the basic scholarly categories [...] mutually corresponding in their essence and belonging to the same type which link them together as a whole."[74] Under the common denominator, Ďurišin had in mind "interliterariness"—according to the conviction of Amiya Dev and Sisir Kumar Das, "the prime rationale of the discipline."[75] As far as I know, Ďurišin did not write or claim that directly, although he mentioned it countless times in his books and essays. Only once did he characterize this most basic category in comparative literature in a few words as follows: "Interliterariness expresses the ontological substance of the interliterary, 'supranational' process, i.e. of the ways, of the course of literary movements, development and events."[76]

Since I had known Ďurišin's works since about 1964 and met him for the first time at the VIth Congress of the AILC/ICLA in Bordeaux in 1970, I had the opportunity to read many of his essays and books where the problems around world literature were discussed. I asked him once, at the beginning of the 1990s, possibly after publication of his *What Is World Literature?*, why he mentions this common denominator so often; he answered briefly but clearly: "Everything in Comparative Literature transgressing the

national literatures is an expression of interliterariness." After more than 25 original books and translations into foreign languages from 1966 to 1992, he probably did not have the time and energy to devote himself to this problem because of bad health before he passed away in January 1997. There is not much written about interliterariness, with the exception of Soviet Russia and the international team of Professor Ďurišin. Some years before his death, I began to devote my attention to this "common denominator" of comparative literature, and its highest category, "world literature," in an essay entitled "East–West Interliterariness: A Theoretical Sketch and a Historical Overview," beginning with *Gilgamesh*, *the Iliad* and *Odyssey*, *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana*, and ending with Rabindranath Tagore, Thomas Mann, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Wole Soyinka. Lu Xun, whom mainly the Chinese want to be one writer in the category of world literature, is also mentioned there.[77] My second essay was a contribution to the *Dictionnaire International des Termes Littéraires*, edited by Jean-Marie Grassin and entitled "Interlitterarité (Interliterariness),"[78] then two essays published in the well-known *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*[79] and one of them, "Interliterariness as a Concept in Comparative Literature," published in Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature and Comparative Cultural Studies*, West-Lafayette: Purdue University Press 2003, pp. 34–44.

According to my inadequate information, there are at least two passages where wenjixing 文际性 interliterariness[80] or wenji guocheng 文际过程 interliterary process[81] is mentioned in Chinese comparative literature in relation to Ďurišin. In both places, world literature is regarded as "the final interliterary community zhongji gongtongti 终极共同体" in his system, which is not true.[82]

I think that among Chinese colleagues, Ďurišin's legacy was not "unjustly rejected," but not enough attention was paid to it. My last essays or lectures on interliterariness[83] or different forms of interliterary communities,[84] trying to bring his ideas and my own remarks closer to Chinese readers, did not find any response, positive or negative. My last paper, "Interliterariness and the Interliterary Communities," in its English version was published in the Proceedings of the Xth International Conference of the CCLA: *Dangdai bijiao wenxue yu fangfalun jiangou* 当代比较文学与方法论建构 *The Formation of Methodology of Contemporary Comparative Literature*. Vol. 1. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe 2014, pp. 87–98.

Conclusion

Now once again, interliterariness is the common denominator of comparative literature transgressing the borders of original literatures in all languages, namely all literatures except the original ones, interliterary communities and world literature. We may regard Ďurišin's system of comparative literature, and interliterariness as its "prime rationale," as a good tool for the study of all kinds of literatures outside of their original roots and also for world literature. Transgressing the borders of their ethnic, national or minority origin and being accepted in the receiving structures has been part and parcel of interliterariness since the time when the Sumerian *Gilgamesh* was received, was probably at least slightly changed in Old Babylonian, Assyrian, Hittite and Hurrian versions, and had an impact on Hebrew and Greek literature. In comparative literature, interliterariness should be the study of all kinds of its expression, in translations first, but also in the reception of foreign writers or their works in books, essays, reviews and in all kinds of literary competence: "reminiscences, impulse, literary coincidence, affinity, parody, travesty and some kinds of grotesque, etc."[85] In this case, we may also include "literary book-loans, imitation, adaptation, resemblance, etc."[86]

In world literature, as the highest category of comparative literature, the literary values of the texts or their authors are the most important for an everlasting or temporary place in it. According to the well-known Swiss scholar Fritz Strich, only that which transcends the frontiers of the single literatures, is highly evaluated abroad and has an impact on the target literary structures belongs to world literature. In his book *Goethe und die Weltliteratur*, he claims that only "such literary work that transcended the borders of the nation where it originated"[87] could be regarded as part of world literature. Of course, not everything translated into foreign languages and read there belongs to world literature. Popular works of low-brow literature, electronic literature, much sensational literature and the like, certainly cannot be included. The duration, in some cases even "eternity," of the world success of the work or author is also very important.

There is a great difference between the world literature and the interliterariness of the time between *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible, nearly 2000 years later, and the world literature and interliterariness in our age of globalization. The interliterariness of our age is *global interliterariness*, comprising all literatures beyond the confines of their origin. Its object is *mundum universum*. In the case of world literature, it is not always the

literary best, usually pertaining to some kind of canon, since sometimes even the works or authors highlighted in their age are forgotten later, but only those belong to it which are *aere perennia* monuments lasting more than bronze (Horace).

To study world literature in this sense and understanding would need the cooperation of the comparatists of the whole world. At least a minimum of agreement among the interested will be necessary. Maybe the Americans, Europeans and the comparatists of the Chinese world could take the initiative and try, with the help of others, to solve the enigma around the shishi feifei around world literature.

References

1. The English version of my paper "Some Remarks on the Concept of World Literature in 2000" appeared in the Proceedings of the conference *Koncepcie svetovej literatúry v epoche globalizácie (Concepts of World Literature in the Age of Globalization.* Ed. by Ján Koška and Pavol Koprda. Bratislava: Institute of World Literature, 2003, pp. 91–106.
2. The English version of this essay appeared in *Human Affairs* (Bratislava), Vol. 11, No. 1, 2001, pp. 23–35. The Chinese version "Shijie wenxue yu wenxuejianxing. Cong Gede dao Du Lishen" 世界文学与文学间性。从歌德到獨里申 "World Literature and Interliterariness. From Goethe to Ďurišin" appeared in *Xiamen daxue xuebao* 厦门大学学报 *Journal of Xiamen University,* 2, 2008, pp. 5–12.
3. Cf. Frank Wollman, "Srovnávací metoda v literární vědе" (Comparative Method in Literary Scholarship), in: *Slovanské štúdie II* (*Slavic Studies !!)*. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1959, pp. 9–27 and Dionýz Ďurišin, *Theory of Literary Comparatistics.* Bratislava: Veda, 1984, pp. 81–82.
4. Dionýz Ďurišin, *Čo je svetová literatúra?,* p. 38.
5. César Domínguez, "Ďurišin and a Systematic Theory of Literature", in: Theo d'Haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 99–107.
6. See *Literary Research/ Recherche Littéraire,* No. 21 (Winter/ hiver) 1993, pp. 27–29.
7. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003.
8. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature*? Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, p. 281.
9. I think that Ďurišin's further stage of interliterary relationship, interliterary centrisms, is not necessary in his system. It is only an adaptation of interliterary communities for larger literary entities, such as the Central European

centrism published later by Ivo Pospíšil and Miloš Zelenka (eds.), *Centrisme interlittéraire des littératures de l'Europe centrale*. Brno: Masarykova universita, 1999, or for the literatures around the Mediterranean Sea by Ďurišin and A. Gnisci (eds.), *Il Mediterraneo. Una rete interletteria*. Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2000. I suppose that the six volumes edited or written by Ďurišin and his international team entitled *Osobitné medziliterárne spoločenstvá (Communautés interlittéraires spécifiques)*, Bratislava: Ústav svetovej literatúry SAV, 1987–1993 are enough for understanding. Also the so-called standard interliterary communities are discussed. It is a pity that all these volumes were published in Slovak with the longer abstract in French. I tried in vain to persuade Ďurišin to publish at least the abstracts in English.

10. Dionýz Ďurišin, *Čo je svetová literature?* pp. 185–190 and his *Theory of Literary Comparatistics*. Bratislava. Veda. The Publishing House of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1984, pp. 178–192.
11. Charles Bernheimer (ed.), op. cit. p. 92.
12. H.H.H. Remak, "Comparative Literature: Its Definition and Function", in: Newton P. Stallknecht and Horst Frenz (eds.), *Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971, p. 1,
13. Harold Bloom, "We Have Lost the War. Interview with Ken Shulman", in: *Newsweek,* Nov. 7, 1994, p. 82.
14. Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature. A Critical Introduction*. Oxford UK & Cambridge USA, Blackwell, 1993, p. 161.
15. Xie Tianzhen 谢天振, "Lun bijiao wenxue de fanyi zhuanxiang" 论比较文学的翻译转向 On the Translation Turn in Comparative Literature. In: Gao Xudong (Editor-in-Chief) 高旭东主编, *Duoyuan wenhua hudong zhongde wenxue duihua* 多元文化互动中的文学对话 *Literary Dialogues in the Context of Multicultural Interactions.* Vol. 1. Peking: Peking University Press, 2010, pp. 205–215. Less attention was given to the problem of translation at the next, Xth Congress of CCLA, Shanghai, August 9–11, 2011.
16. Dionýz Ďurišin, op. cit., p. 14.
17. Ibid., p. 38.
18. This is The Report of the State of the Discipline by the American Comparative Literature Association published in Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 2006.
19. Cf. Damrosch's book above, p. 281 and Saussy's essay, p. 11.
20. Anton Pokrivčák, "On Some Worlds of World Literature(s): A Book Review Article on Ďurišin's, Casanova's, and Damrosch's Work", in: *CLCWEB: Comparative Literature and Culture,* 15, 7, 2013, p. 4. http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/vol15/iss6/21 Special Issue *New Work about World*

Literatures. Ed. Graciela Boruszko and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. Damrosch's original states: "These three conceptions are not mutually exclusive, though sometimes people of decided taste champion one or another and even portray their favorite mode as the one form of literature worth serious attention […] There is really no good reason why we shouldn't allow all three categories their ongoing value, particularly as a single work may effectively be classified under two or even all three headings" (*What is World Literature,* p. 15).

21. César Domínguez, op. cit., p. 104. Under Franco Moretti is meant his "Conjectures on World Literature", in: Christopher Prendergast (ed.), *Debating World Literature*. London: Verso, 2004, pp. 148–162, originally published in *New Left Review,* 1, January-February 2000, pp. 54–68; Andrew Milner: "When Worlds Collide: Comparative Literature, World-Systems-Theory and Science-Fiction", in: *Southern Review: Communication, Politics & Culture,* Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 54–68; Alexander Beecroft: "World Literature without a Hyphen. Towards Typology of Literary Systems", in: *New Left Review,* Vol. 54, pp. 87–100; and Emily Apter, "Literary World-Systems", in: David Damrosch (ed.), *"Teaching World Literature."* New York: The Modern Language Association of America, pp. 44–60.
22. Published in Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1972.
23. Published in Bratislava: Comenius University, 1974.
24. Ďurišin's paper "La conditionalité historique des formes de la communication interlittéraire" was later published in *Actes du VI-e Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée,* Bordeaux, 1975, pp. 497–501.
25. Douwe Fokkema: "Method and Programme of Comparative Literature", in: *Synthesis* (Bucharest), 1, 1974, p. 1.
26. Ulrich Weisstein, "Assessing the Assessors. An Anatomy of Comparative Literature", in: János Riesz *et al* (eds.), *Sensus Communis. Contemporary Trends in Comparative Literature*. Tübingen: Günther Verlag, 1986, p. 101.
27. See op. cit., Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 82.
28. See "Present State and Perspectives of Slovak Comparative Literary Studies." *Neohelicon,* Vol. 3, No. 3–4, 1975, p. 115.
29. Ibid., p. 114.
30. *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* (Bloomington), Vol. 37, 1988, p. 109.
31. Loc. cit.
32. It is possible to mention here Kushner's "Towards a Typology of Comparative Literary Studies?", in: *ICLA'91 Tokyo. The Force of Vision 3. Literary Theory. Proceedings of the XIIIth Congress of the International*

Comparative Literature Association. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1995, pp. 508–509.

33. Ulrich Weisstein: *Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft. Erster Bericht: 1968–1977.* Bern und Frankfurt am Main. Peter Lang, 1981, pp. 48–51.
34. *Neohelicon*. Vol. 11, no. 1, 1984, pp. 211–221.
35. Letter was dated June 17, 1992.
36. *Zhongguo bijiao wenxue* 中国比较文学 *Comparative wenxue in China,* 2, 1990, pp. 86–87.
37. Chengdu: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1988, pp. 81–82. Xie Tianzhen's reply to Ďurišin's letter, dated March 15, 1988, shows that Xie Tianzhen regarded Ďurišin's first book, which he, like Liao Hongjun, read in its Russian version, as one of the 10 best works on the theory of comparative literature.
38. Gurbhagat Singh, "Futuristic Directions for Comparative Literature", in: *ICLA'91. Tokyo. The Force of Vision 3,* pp. 309–317.
39. Vojtech Filkorn, op. cit., *Filozofia (Philosophy),* No. 6, 1971, p. 607.
40. Ibid., p. 606.
41. Cf. a slightly corrected translation by Jessy Kocmanová of Dionýz Ďurišin: *Theory of Literary Comparatistics,* Bratislava: Veda. Publishing House of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1984, p. 89.
42. See his "World-System analysis: An Introduction." Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
43. See his *Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip 11*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
44. *Poetics Today. Polysystem Studies,* Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 53–72, especially 54–62.
45. G. Lindberg-Wada (ed.), *Studying Transcultural Literary History.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006, pp. 113–121.
46. Ibid., p. 113.
47. Loc. cit.
48. Ibid., p. 121.
49. Alexander Beecroft, "World Literature without a Hyphen. Towards a Typology of Literary Systems", in: *New Left Review,* Nov.- Dec. 2008, p. 88.
50. Loc. cit.
51. Ibid., p. 100.
52. David Damrosch, "Comparative World Literature", in: Liviu Papadima, David Damrosch and Theo D'haen: *"The Canonical Debate Today. Crossing Disciplinary and Cultural Boundaries."* Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2011, p. 169.
53. Ibid. p. 174.
54. Oana Fotache: "'Global Literature' – In Search of Definition." In: Liviu Papadima, David Damrosch and Theo D'haen, op. cit., p. 194.

55. See Liviu Papadima, David Damrosch and Theo D'haen, op. cit., p. 22.
56. See the opinion of Czech comparatist Frank Wollman in note 2.
57. Cf. the claims in notes 2 and 3 of this chapter.
58. See Terian's essay, p. 23.
59. Wang Ning, "Comparative Literature in the Global Context: A Chinese Theoretical Perspective", in: Cheng Aimin 程爱民 and Yang Lixin 杨莉馨 (eds.), *Comparative Literature in the Cross-cultural Context* 跨文化语境中的比较文学. Nanking: Yilin Press, 2003, p. 64.
60. Peking: Peking University Press, 1981.
61. Changsha: Hunan Renmin chubanshe, 1985.
62. Cf. Gao Xudong 高旭东 (Editor-in-Chief), op. cit. Peking: Peking University Press, 2010, pp. 51–57. The last part connected with Vietnamese literature from Damrosch's paper is omitted.
63. Yan Shaodang and Chen Sihe 陈思和 (eds.), op. cit., Peking: Peking University Press, 2007.
64. As far as I know, the papers by Wang Ning and Wang Jiezhi have not been published as yet.
65. The proceedings of this symposium were published in *Neohelicon,* Vol. 38, No. 2, 2011.
66. See http://iwl.fas.harvard.edu/pages/past-sessions (June 25, 2015).
67. The book was published in Shenyang: Liaoning University Press, 1989.
68. The text and translation are taken from *The Works of Hsüntze* 荀子. Trans. from the Chinese, with Notes by Homer H. Dubs, Taipei: Wenzhi chubanshe, 1983, pp. 28–29.
69. *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*. New York: Portland House, 1989, p. 297.
70. Haun Saussy, "Comparisons, World Literature, Common Denominator", in: Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas (eds.), *A Companion to Comparative Literature*. New York: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011, p. 61.
71. Ibid., pp. 61–62.
72. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, p. 239.
73. Bratislava: Veda. Publishing House of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, p. 225.
74. See Slovak version, pp. 239–240.
75. See the blurb of the book edited by the comparatists mentioned above: *Comparative Literature. Theory and Practice*. New Delhi: Indian Institute of Advanced Study Shimla in association with Allied Publishers, 1989.
76. Dionýz Ďurišin: *Osobitné medziliterárne spoločenstvá 6. Pojmy a princípy (Specific Interliterary Communities. 6. Concepts and Principles)*. Bratislava: Ústav svetovej literatúry SAV, 1993, p. 14.
77. See the book in note 75.
78. Originally published at http://www-ditl.unilim.fr/interlit.html.

79. "Interliterariness as a Concept in Comparative Literature", in: *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture,* 2,4, 2000. https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1089 and "Concepts of World Literature, Comparative Literature, and a Proposal", in: *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture,* 2, 4, 2000. https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1091. One essay: "Comparative Literature as a Concept of Interliterariness and Interliterary Process" was published among the selected papers of the XIVth Congress of the ICLA/AILC, Edmonton 1994, in Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, Milan V. Dimić and Irene Sywenky (eds.), *Comparative Literature Now. Theories and Practice*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999, pp. 95–104.
80. Lu Zhaoming 陆肇明, "Shijie wenxue" yu Jiu Lishen de "wenji gongtongti" "世界文学"与久里申的"文际共同体" "World Literature" and Ďurišin's "Interliterary Communities". *Zhongguo bijiao wenxue Comparative Literature in China,* 3, 1997, pp. 148–153. Lu Zhaoming used for his essay the book by Dionýz Ďurišin and others: *Osobyje mežliteraturyje obščnost (Specific Interliterary Communities)*. Tashkent: Izdateľstvo Fan, 1993.
81. Cao Shunqing 曹顺庆 (Editor-in-Chief), *Bijiao wenxuexue* 比较文学学 *The Study of Comparative Literature*. Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 116.
82. Cf. note 81, p. 152 and note 82, p. 116. The part concerned with Ďurišin and his views on world literature and interliterary process was written by Wang Qinfeng 王钦锋。
83. See opening remarks to the Xth International Conference of the CCLA, Shanghai, 2011, "Back to Literariness? – And What About Interliterariness", published in its English version in *Studia orientalia slovaca*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 427–430.
84. Marián Gálik, "On the New Chinese Literature as an Interliterary Community," in: *Frontiers of Literary Studies,* Vol. 5, No. 2, 2011, pp. 139–158. Its Chinese version *Zuo wei quawenxue gongtongti de hanyu xin wenxue* 作为跨文学共同体的汉语新文学 appeared in *Nanguo renwen xuekan* 南国人文学刊 *South China Journal of Humanities,* 1, 2011, pp. 14–30.
85. Dionýz Ďurišin, *Problémy literárnej komparatistiky (Problems of Literary Comparatistics)*. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1967, p. 73.
86. Ibid., p. 84.
87. Fritz Strich, *Goethe und die Weltliteratur.* Bern: A. Francke AG, 1946, p. 14.



CHAPTER 7

World Literature, Canon, and Literary Criticism

Zhang Longxi

There is no doubt that world literature is on the rise and gathering momentum in literary studies everywhere today, not just in the USA and Europe, but also in China, Korea, India, Turkey, Brazil, and many other countries in other parts of the world. We may look at some publications and institutions as indicators of the rise of world literature, though the books and journals mentioned here are not meant to be exhaustive and complete. Publishers like Norton, Longman, and Bedford have all published anthologies of world literature, and Routledge has published a companion to world literature as well as a reader and a concise history. Brill and Wiley-Blackwell also take an active interest in publishing books related to world literature, and there are of course university presses with similar interests.[1] Publication of such books is mostly based on market investigations that gauge readers' interests and demands, as well as on the expectation of a new trend with potential for further research and scholarship. These are publications in English, but there are also publications in other languages, such as the Korean journal *Chigujŏk segye munhak* or *Global World*

Zhang Longxi (✉)
Department of Chinese and History,
City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
e-mail: ctlxzh@cityu.edu.hk

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_7

Literature, recently started in Seoul in 2012, and the long-standing Chinese journal in Beijing, *Shijie wenxue* 世界文学 or *World Literature*, which has introduced many works of foreign literature to Chinese readers in translation since 1953. The MLA has a volume on *Teaching World Literature* edited by David Damrosch, and Damrosch's own book, *What Is World Literature?*, first published by Princeton University Press in 2003 and since translated into several languages, has become probably the single most influential text in the study of world literature. Launched in March 2016 and published by Brill, the new *Journal of World Literature* is the first important journal that provides an international forum to the study of world literature with a truly global vision and high aims. Under my editorship, Palgrave Macmillan will publish a book series with the general title *Canon and World Literature*. These publications are, or will be, widely used as materials in courses on world literature offered at many universities, and Harvard's Institute for World Literature (IWL), with David Damrosch as director and inaugurated in Beijing in 2011, continued in Istanbul in 2012, at Harvard in 2013, Hong Kong in 2014, Lisbon in 2015, back at Harvard in 2016, Copenhagen in 2017, and Tokyo in 2018, has become a successful international platform for both theoretical explorations and pedagogical practices of teaching world literature. The IWL has drawn hundreds of enthusiastic graduate students and faculty members from dozens of countries every summer. There is no denying that most books and articles on world literature are published in America and Europe, and mostly in English, and that scholars like David Damrosch are the moving forces behind the renewed interest in world literature, but anyone criticizing the rise of world literature as just another wave of American influence is simply turning a blind eye to the global situation and the broad international effort and collaboration of scholars in different countries from different continents. That is the reason why our International Dialogue and Forum on world literature held at Beijing Normal University was so timely and important and had such a special meaning. This is yet another clear indication that world literature is on the rise everywhere in our world today.

World Literature in Context

Nothing rises without motion or motivation, and there are very good reasons for the rise of world literature. First of all, there is a sort of internal and immediate context for its rise. Beginning in the 1970s, Russian formalism, structural linguistics, anthropology, semiotics, psychoanalysis, sociology, and philosophy provided stimulation, theoretical frameworks,

and innovative approaches to the study of literature. Structuralism and later poststructuralism had a tremendous impact on the study of literature, particularly narrative fiction. Postmodernism, postcolonialism, Marxism, feminism, gender studies, gay and lesbian studies, and many other theoretical approaches brought socially committed positions and concerns to the study of literature. During the 1970s and 1980s, literary theory was making the study of literature an exciting and productive business, though not without some overreaching extremes. By the 1990s and beyond, however, much of literary studies became so overly dominated by theories that literary criticism was turned into a discourse engaged with a lot of critical theories but very little literature. Reading literature became a problem, and literary study was gradually supplanted by cultural studies. This became a serious problem acknowledged in the American Comparative Literature Association's state-of-the-field report 10 years ago. "To be a linguist these days, you do not have to know a lot of languages," as Haun Saussy wrote in that report, "at moments in the last few decades, it has seemed possible to make a career in literary studies without making sustained reference to works of literature."[2] Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that literary studies gradually lost its identity *as literary studies*, and that many scholars started to talk about the crisis of literary studies and of the humanities in general.

The problem was not limited to American universities, however, because whatever is local in the United States tends to become global with America's worldwide influence. For example, Terry Eagleton remarks, not without a certain degree of sarcasm, that "nothing is more indigenously American these days than otherness," because to respect the other is a way to deal with "the intractable ethnic problems in the United States." To be fair, such problems are not just present in the United States, but in the United Kingdom and Europe at large as well. "These home-grown concerns," says Eagleton, "are then projected onto the rest of the globe rather like a cultural version of nuclear missile bases, so that post-colonial others find themselves obediently adopting the agenda of a largely American-bred cult of otherness." This is so because, to put it simply, America is "the nation which sets the academic pace in these affairs."[3] Harish Trivedi, a well-known Indian scholar, holds a very similar view. "Only yesterday," says Trivedi with reference to the study of English literature in India, again not without a degree of sarcasm, "have we begun asking questions about canon, context, relevance, reception, response, the other, the alternative (alter-native?), historicism old and new, orientalism, feminism, and the all-Derriding Theory,

and this for the good reason that such questions began to be asked about English literature in England and America the day before yesterday."[4] That is to say, what the postcolonial others are doing is still, ironically, to follow the agenda set up in academic institutions in England and North America. Even in China, which was never colonized and therefore is not postcolonial in a strict sense, the same problem also exists, though mostly in the study of modern literature and less so in the study of China's classical tradition. I have often heard that students are required to make clear what theoretical approach they are using in discussing any given literary work, and all available theoretical approaches are those from Western academia. What comes out of such a mechanical application of Western theory to Chinese literature is more often than not a dull piece peppered with some critical buzzwords and jargon that have little to do with the Chinese literary text.

World literature is on the rise because it offers a solution to that problem, a welcome opportunity to return to the reading of literature on a much larger scale than ever before. The fact that world literature is having a very warm reception among both graduate students and university faculties—of course, not without critiques and challenges at the same time—shows that most people do love literature, and that the reading, appreciation, and interpretation of great literary works are fundamentally important for our sense of culture and tradition. The rise of world literature responds to the desire for reading literature and satisfies the need of literary criticism. It helps to remind literary scholars that their business is, or should be, first and foremost to make sense of literary works from different traditions in a global perspective, beyond narrowly defined linguistic or national boundaries.

We are living in an increasingly globalized world, and that constitutes an external and larger context for the rise of world literature. Globalization has made it impossible to prevent the flow of information and communication, even though there are also concomitant efforts to hold on to local and national identities, which are not only still relevant, but also powerful and important in today's world. The local and the global create a tension for much of what is happening in our world today, both in positively productive terms and in negatively destructive ways. Whether positive or negative, global connectedness is a fact in contemporary life, and its effect is not only felt in the world's economy and in politics, but also increasingly visible in the study of culture and tradition. The critique of Eurocentrism is first of all the result of social, political, and intellectual developments in Europe and North America in an age of globalization,

which makes it possible for scholars to assume a global perspective far beyond the parochialism of Eurocentric views. Without the critique of Eurocentrism and the awareness of cultural diversity, world literature in a truly global sense would not have its chance to arise. At the same time, the critique of Eurocentrism must not lead to its simple replacement by any other ethnocentrism. In the context of globalization and the critique of ethnocentrism, then, the rise of world literature is not only a tendency in the internal context of literary studies and answering to a teaching need in the institutions of higher education, but also part of a humanistic effort to promote cross-cultural understanding for the peaceful coexistence of different nations and cultures in our world today. The rise of world literature is possible in a world that is open and conscious of its rich cultural diversity, and at the same time world literature helps make the world more open, and more appreciative of its rich legacy in literatures and cultures.

World Literature and a Cosmopolitan Vision

Any discussion of world literature is likely at some point to trace back to the significant originating moment in the early 1820s when Johann Wolfgang von Goethe called for the advent of the era of *Weltliteratur*. It is particularly fitting that we recalled that moment in Beijing because it was in his conversation with Johann Peter Eckermann, in talking about his reading of a Chinese novel, that Goethe famously declared that "poetry is the universal possession of mankind […] National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World-literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach."[5] Under the influence of Johann Gottfried von Herder's (1744–1803) idea of the voices of different peoples articulated in different languages and literatures, the German concept of *Literaturwissenschaft* or the study of literature has a strongly cosmopolitan interest in the world's great variety of literary expressions, including non-European ones. For Goethe, that Chinese novel stood in sharp contrast to European works he was familiar with—the poetry of Pierre-Jean de Béranger, for instance—particularly in the moderation of emotions and the moral propriety of characterization, which he admired in the Chinese work. At the same time, the Chinese novel also appeared to him so congenial and displayed features of such common humanity that Goethe felt a sense of affinity despite the strangeness of a foreign text, and he detected a kind of underlying link that connected literary works of the world's different nations to form one great *Weltliteratur*.

Goethe's concept of poetry as universal made him not only a major poet in the European tradition, but a poet of the world. He certainly thought of himself as rooted in the heritage of the Greco-Roman classical tradition, but his vision was larger than that. Indeed, compared with most of his contemporaries, Goethe had a much wider range of interests in literary works outside Europe, as is evidenced not only in his reading of a Chinese novel, but also in his admiration of the Indian poet Kalidasa's dramatic work, *Sakuntala*, and his appreciation of the Persian poet Hafiz, whose *ghazals* provided inspiration for him to write the *West-östlicher Diwan*. Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur* thus embodies a cosmopolitan spirit that encompasses the entire range of the world's literary expressions, a cosmopolitan vision of truly global dimensions. But what is cosmopolitanism? Etymologically it comes from a Greek word, *kosmopolitês*, that means "citizen of the world," and as a philosophical concept it may have very different interpretations at different times by different thinkers; but whatever it is, cosmopolitanism is the opposite of parochialism, the negation of ethnocentric tribalism or narrow-minded nationalism. Here I am using the concept of cosmopolitanism as the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah discussed it, which has two different notions intertwined:

> One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance.[6]

In a way, these two notions or aspects of cosmopolitanism represent the universal and the particular, the global and the local, a general principle and a specific application. At the core of this concept of cosmopolitanism is the principle of extending one's moral sentiments beyond one's own family, friends, group, and nation. In other words, cosmopolitanism means to cultivate the feeling of shared, common humanity with strangers, foreigners, people outside one's own community. Each person has local moorings and local loyalties, but the one thing that cosmopolitans all share, says Appiah, "is that no local loyalty can ever justify forgetting that each human being has responsibilities to every other."[7] Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur* is cosmopolitan because it is not limited to his own local tradition of European literature, but embraces literatures of the whole world, including Chinese, Indian, Persian, and potentially all other non-European traditions.

Interestingly, in discussing the cosmopolitan principle of extending one's moral responsibilities to strangers and outsiders, Appiah uses "killing a Chinese mandarin" as a conceptual metaphor to illustrate the idea of a moral choice. He cites Balzac's novel *Le Père Goriot*, in which the protagonist Eugène Rastignac asks a friend whether he recalls a passage in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "where he asks the reader what he'd do if he could make himself rich by killing an old mandarin in China merely by willing it, without budging from Paris?"[8] Appiah suggests that the source of Balzac's idea may come from Adam Smith rather than Rousseau, because "Rousseau doesn't seem to have posed this question."[9] In his famous novel *The Count of Monte Cristo*, however, Alexandre Dumas also refers to "the paradox of Jean Jacques Rousseau, — you know, — the mandarin, who is killed at 500 leagues' distance by raising the tip of the finger."[10] In a learned article, Carlo Ginzburg traces the metaphor to Denis Diderot and particularly to Chateaubriand's popular work *The Genius of Christianity*, in which the author writes, "I put to myself this question: 'If thou couldst by a mere wish kill a fellow-creature in China, and inherit his fortune in Europe, with the supernatural conviction that the fact would never be known, wouldst thou consent to form such a wish?'" The question is almost identical with Rastignac's in Balzac's novel, but Chateaubriand used that hypothetical question to prove the ubiquitous presence of conscience, the conviction that a moral being would never entertain the idea of killing a Chinese mandarin and getting his wealth by mere volition, even if there was no risk of being found out and punished. No matter how one may rationalize the distant killing of a Chinese far from Europe, says Chateaubriand, "in spite of all my useless subterfuges, I hear a voice in the recesses of my soul, protesting so loudly against the mere idea of such a supposition, that I cannot for one moment doubt the reality of conscience."[11] In fact, *tuer le mandarin* or "to kill a mandarin" was a rather popular motif in nineteenth-century European literature and became a proverbial expression in French that implies getting rich by dubious means.[12] For nineteenth-century Europeans, China was a faraway place, and *tuer le mandarin* posed a hypothetical question as "Rousseau's paradox," to which how a European would respond, whether he would entertain the fantasy of distant killing, became a moral choice with philosophical implications.

Another interesting illustration Appiah uses in discussing the moral principle of cosmopolitanism is what he calls the Singer principle. "If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out," says Appiah by quoting the philosopher

Peter Singer. "This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing."[13] This is interesting, because what Singer says here is echoing what the Confucian philosopher Mencius 孟子 (385?–304? BC) said more than 2000 years ago in his argument for the basic moral instincts in an inherently good human nature. "Now upon seeing, all of a sudden, a child about to fall into a well, everyone would feel horrified and compassionate not because one would want to make friends with the child's parents, not because one would want to make a reputation among neighbors and friends, nor because one hates to hear the child crying," says Mencius. "From this we may conclude that he who does not have a heart of compassion is not human."[14] The similarity of idea and image here is astonishing. Did Singer know Mencius in translation? It is very tempting to see a connection between the two philosophers, one ancient Chinese and the other modern Australian-American, who both use the image of a child about to drown to argue for the primacy of a moral response. The connection may or may not be real, and we are not here to establish what in the old type of comparative literature is called a *rapport de fait*, but the point is that in both the East and the West, cosmopolitanism appeals to our basic human decency and moral sensibility to form a vision that tries to transcend the natural but dangerous tendency towards self-centered interests, parochialism, and ethnocentrism, and to liberate us to become truly human in the moral and political sense of being fellow citizens not only with those we know as family, friends, and neighbors, but also with those who are strangers, foreigners, and outsiders. World literature in its true sense is or should be part of that cosmopolitan vision, which serves to make us fellow citizens with all those whose literature and culture we appreciate and love as much as our own. World literature demands a global and cosmopolitan vision that always sees beyond our immediate circles and local concerns.

From the very beginning, comparative literature is meant to be open and liberal, transcending the linguistically and culturally homogeneous traditions of national literatures. When it was established as a scholarly discipline in the nineteenth century, however, its scope was largely European, and its linguistic requirement of 10 languages, the *Dekaglottismus* proposed by Hugo von Meltzl, impressive as it is, did not include a single non-European language. In the 1970s, the French comparatist and intellectual René Étiemble already challenged comparative literature's focus on Western Europe, and advocated a much wider scope to include "the Sanskrit, Chinese, Tamil, Japanese, Bengali, Iranian, Arab or Marathi literatures, all,

or at least some, of which had already produced their master works at a time when the majority of the *Dekaglottismus* literatures did not yet exist, or were still in their infancy."[15] More recently, Franco Moretti also complained that comparative literature "has not lived up to" the cosmopolitan idea of *Weltliteratur* that Goethe or Karl Marx had in mind, but has been "fundamentally limited to Western Europe and mostly revolving around the river Rhine (German philologists working on French literature). Not much more."[16] World literature is now trying to change precisely that and make comparative literature true to its own ideal of being cosmopolitan and planetary.

Given the imbalance of power between the West and the Rest in the global economic and political arena, however, it is difficult to get out of the powerful Eurocentric view of the world, particularly for scholars of a powerful and excellent tradition like the French. Many have criticized the Eurocentric bias expressed in Pascale Casanova's idea of *la république mondiale des lettres*, because in her view, world literary history started in Renaissance Italy and then France, and gradually moved to other parts of the world along with the expansion of European power in the nineteenth century, followed by the twentieth-century decolonization of Africa and Asia. She lays a particular emphasis on Paris as the capital of the "world republic of letters," and maintains that her Paris-centered literary space is based on historical facts: "the claim that Paris is the capital of literature is not an effect of Gallocentrism," says Casanova, "but the result of a careful historical analysis showing that the exceptional concentration of literary resources that occurred in Paris over the course of several centuries gradually led to its recognition as the center of the literary world."[17] But surely world history is much longer than the modern period since the Renaissance, and the world as a whole, with important multiple centers, is definitely larger than Paris or France. One may wonder whether Casanova is aware of other centers of cultural and literary resources outside Europe, such as the Persian and the Ottoman Empires, or imperial China, which functioned as a center in the East Asian region long before the European Renaissance. How could "a careful historical analysis" have missed all that and turned such a blind eye to much of the literary world outside France? That is frustrating, but it also illustrates the importance of a cosmopolitan vision in our discussion of world literature today. We now must take the "world" in "world literature" seriously, and as a result any study of world literature must cover a large area across regions, and must consider literary works from different continents. The global cultural cartography is important,

because we must have the consciousness that we are talking about world literature, not a local tradition, not literature of one region, but literature of the entire world.

Canon, Literariness, and Literary Criticism

So what is world literature? Of course, David Damrosch has written a wonderful book on that very issue and, as I said earlier, that book has greatly influenced the way we think of world literature today. First of all, world literature is not and cannot be the simple juxtaposition of all the literary works ever produced in the world. There are simply far too many books to read and no matter how many or how fast one can read, nobody can read world literature in a quantitative sense. "Reading 'more' seems hardly to be the solution," as Franco Moretti remarks. "It has to be different. The *categories* have to be different."[18] Moretti proposes "distant reading" as the method for the study of world literature, particularly the novel, and aims to find patterns in a large amount of literary works. There are of course other ways to conceptualize or reconceptualize world literature. If not all literary works are part of world literature, there must be those that succeed in becoming world literature, and those that fail to do so. There must be differentiation, and how to differentiate is an important methodological issue. As I understand it, the differentiating category Damrosch proposes in his book is *circulation*, for he conceives of world literature as encompassing "all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language (Virgil was long read in Latin in Europe)."[19] Taking this as a working definition, we may see two important elements in this concept: one is *circulation* beyond a literary work's original context, and the other is the *language* in which a literary work circulates. As all literary works are composed in a particular language within a particular national and cultural tradition: be it English, French, German, Chinese, Sanskrit, Urdu, Hindi, Persian, Arabic, Swahili, Hausa, or any other, they are first circulating within limits of that linguistic and cultural community and read by native readers in that condition. A work in that status is local, not global, but it becomes a work of world literature when it circulates beyond its original environment to reach readers outside its native and local condition. In that sense, global circulation becomes a prerequisite for world literature. But a work of literature is always read in a particular language, and when it circulates beyond its culture of origin, it must circulate in a language that has a wide-ranging

currency as the lingua franca of a given area and a given period of time. That is the significance of Virgil as Damrosch's example, because it is a classical work that circulated in its original Latin as Europe's lingua franca from late antiquity till the early modern time. In this part of the world—that is, in premodern East Asia—literary Chinese was the lingua franca widely used not only in China, but also in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Certain important works written in Chinese could thus circulate in the East Asian region far beyond Chinese borders.

In the seventeenth century, French competed with Latin for prestige and influence, and it became a lingua franca for artists, writers, and the high society in nineteenth-century Europe. For our world today, there is no question that English is the most widely used language, a contemporary lingua franca used probably by more non-native than native speakers in the world today. As a consequence, then, works written in English have a better chance of circulating globally in the original, and works written in other languages could become known and circulate beyond their culture of origin if they are translated into English. Some scholars resent this "hegemony" of English, and some comparatists, with their disciplinary emphasis on working with the original, object to world literature that makes translation a necessary component. As I see it, there is nothing inherently "hegemonic" about English as a language, because people can use it to express and communicate what they want to say and for their own benefit. I still remember the justification for learning the language of "US imperialism" in China when I was a high school student in the early 1960s, a justification provided by none other than Karl Marx himself: "Eine fremde Sprache ist eine Waffe im Kampf des Lebens (A foreign language is a weapon in the struggle of life)."[20] I still think that is a pretty good justification for learning a foreign language, even though it doesn't have to be for a fight that you learn foreign languages, which can give you so much in opening your eyes and your mind, but for learning about other peoples' cultures, histories, and traditions, and for the possibility of acquiring and cultivating a cosmopolitan vision. As a lingua franca, English empowers whoever uses it, and it is therefore very important particularly for non-native speakers to have a good command of English so that they can use it to have their voice better heard in an international arena. That is of course what people are already doing in China, as in many other parts of the world. In my view, there is also nothing wrong with using translation in the study of world literature either, because no one can read all works of world literature in the original, especially works written in "minor" or

"less studied" languages, precisely the linguistic and cultural areas that world literature is expanding into. The emphasis on translation in world literature thus calls for more knowledge of languages, not less, and knowledge not only of major European languages, but beyond comparative literature's traditional requirement of proficiency in the major European languages, particularly French and German.

As we have seen, the sheer quantity of available works of literature in the world is so huge that it becomes absolutely necessary to have a mechanism of differentiation and selection. David Damrosch makes circulation the mechanism, arguing that "world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of materials, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike."[21] Such a concept is certainly open, flexible, and generous enough to accommodate both individual works and literary genres, both classics and newly discovered gems. Circulation beyond a local context, as we have seen, is the minimum threshold requirement for a literary work to enter the global category of world literature, but circulation per se does not seem to me discriminating enough for the selection of the best works from the world's various literary traditions. I do not think we can equate circulation of books, which is a quantitative notion based on print runs and sales numbers, with the best of books, which is a qualitative notion based on value judgment and critical examination. Many best-selling books may not survive the test of time, and the most popular fiction may not be the best in literary value. It is true that quantity and quality are not mutually exclusive, and some widely circulating books may well be excellent books, but that is to be determined by criticism, not by circulation as such. Of course, value judgment is always difficult, debatable, even controversial, and it is understandable that critical evaluation is not a favorite idea with literary scholars at the present time when literary studies is so often politicized, characterized by contention, controversy, and even conflict, but literary criticism is what we need to differentiate works and select the best among them to form a canon of world literature. Damrosch is right to say that world literature may appear differently with partially overlapping but distinct canons in different countries, for the global concept of world literature will always be realized locally and thus be localized in its actual manifestation. World literature is always poised between the local and the global, the cosmopolitan ideal of universality and the national basis of literary and cultural activities. It is the differently localized world literature

that makes the notion surprising, unpredictable, and stimulating, and thus contributes to the richness of world literature as such.

Criticism, according to Gregory Nagy, comes from the Hellenistic "Alexandrian concept of *krisis*, in the sense of 'separating', 'discriminating', 'judging' those works and those authors that are to be preserved and those that are not," and it is "crucial to the concept of 'canon' in the Classical world."[22] In essence, literary criticism means first and foremost to judge the value of a work of literature. It is likely that where there is literature, there is also such a critical sense, the activity of "judging" the value of works and "separating" or "discriminating" the valuable from the less valuable, and there is likely to be a small number of works judged to be worthy of preservation as the best or the canonical in that tradition. In China, Confucius himself was said to have performed the critical function of selecting 300 poems out of the pool of 3000 to compile the *Shi jing* 诗经 or the *Classic of Poetry*. One of the early critical works is *Shi ping* 诗品 or the *Ranking of Poetry* by Zhong Rong 锺嵘 (459–518), who classified more than 100 poets into three ranks according to certain criteria, and Xiao Tong 萧统 (501–531), Prince Zhaoming of the Liang Court 梁昭明太子, compiled *Wen xuan* 文选 or *Selections of Refined Literature*, the earliest anthology of poetry and literary prose in China, which helps preserve the best of literary works from early antiquity till his own time in the sixth century. In his preface to the anthology, Xiao Tong clearly stated that he would exclude texts from the Confucian classics and other philosophical schools, and also historical writings, for he wanted to include in his anthology only texts judged beautiful and elegant in language, effective in evoking certain moods or emotions, distinguished from those with practical values or for moral education. His purpose was to "reduce the weedy and collect the prime (略其芜秽, 集其清英)."[23] This shows that a concept of literary writing appreciated for its aesthetic values clearly manifested itself in the sixth century in China, and with it also a clear sense of differentiation, the need to separate the canonical works to be preserved in his anthology from those lesser works unworthy of preservation. Literary criticism thus helps establish a certain number of canonical works in a literary tradition, and given the limitation of our life span and the limited number of books we can ever read, we'd better read those that have already been selected and judged the best in the world's different literatures. For me, therefore, world literature is not just literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, though that is a prerequisite for world literature, but the collection and integration of canonical works in the

world's various literary traditions, canonical works that have been judged worthy by critics and literary scholars who know those traditions best. As we know so little about world literature, especially non-Western and "minor" literary traditions, aesthetic judgment accomplished through literary criticism would be my differentiating category to distinguish the best from the average, the canonical from the run-of-the-mill, or the classic from the merely popular or fashionable. As Damrosch remarks, world literature can be understood as the classics, as masterpieces, or as windows on the world. I would think that literary canon can be all three, as they are definitely the classics of a literary tradition, the masterpieces among works from that tradition, and also the best windows onto that part of the world. Thus we need literary critics and scholars of different linguistic and cultural traditions to tell us about their own literary canons, to reveal to us the beauty and richness of meaning of their canonical works, to convince us of their literary and cultural values, and to explain to us why we should read them. Otherwise we would not know, and I would argue that much of world literature remains unknown, yet to be discovered, criticized, explored, and canonized.

The value of a literary work can be judged in different ways, and different critics may value a work of literature for different reasons. Psychoanalytic critics may regard literary works as sublimations of repressed sexual desires, Marxist critics may read literary works as disguised ideologies with different class consciousness, and feminists may concentrate on a literary work's representation of gender politics. Such interpretive strategies may all produce some insights and reveal something in literary works that are of value for psychoanalysis, Marxism, or other social and political theories, but they may also easily drift away from literature as such. In my view, literature is first of all the art of language, and the aesthetic experience of reading, the appreciation of the beauty and depth of a great literary work, should be the basis of any critical judgment. What makes literature literary, or what the Russian formalists called "literariness," should be the focus of critical attention. This means first and foremost a concern about the literary language and how it works in a literary text. In this respect, we may learn from Indian or Sanskrit poetics about the centrality of the literary language. "Indian thinking on poetry, which is largely centered around language," as R. S. Pathak argues, "regards poetry primarily as a linguistic organization."[24] Barbara Miller also says that much of traditional Indian literature "is characterized by a preoccupation with the nature of language."[25] The very name of Sanskrit, as Sheldon Pollock notes, means an elevated language "'put together' by

means of phonological and morphological transformations."[26] I believe this is true of all literary traditions, because we value literary works that not only express ideas and emotions, but express them in such beautiful and powerful ways, with a particular set of words, phrases, and images, that we enjoy reading them with great pleasure. Literary criticism should therefore engage literary texts, and give explanation of the ways in which the language of a particular text works.

Paying attention to literary language, however, does not mean a purely linguistic or textual approach to literature with no connection to anything else, for a truly great work of literature always contains more than what is explicitly said in the language of the text, always has relevance and connections to some important social, historical, religious, or philosophical issues of the time, and always has something revelatory about life and the world that would give us a better and deeper understanding of ourselves and of others. One interesting example is the study of the close relationship between language and cognition. Since the innovative, seminal work by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), and several other follow-up works, we now have a much better understanding of how cognition and literary language can be fruitfully studied in mutual illumination. We now see human thinking imbedded in conceptual metaphors, and many themes and their variations in literary language may lead us to have a better understanding of how we conceptualize our world with the help of language, especially literary language. Peter Stockwell calls it "cognitive poetics," which is all about "the study of literary reading."[27] The best kind of literary criticism thus always gives us more than textual analysis, but makes us understand better and deeper the values of the work in a rich context, a context with complex social, political, historical, and intellectual issues. Criticism makes us know better the literary work and its context, the larger cultural, social, and historical context of that work.

Here I would like to come back to the cosmopolitan vision we relate to world literature. If cosmopolitanism means to have a sense of shared, common humanity with people outside one's own community, that would lead to the view that we can all understand each other as human beings with basic similar needs, desires, behavior patterns, emotional responses, and so on, despite even the most entrenched differences in language, history, culture, and belief systems. In fact, differences are obvious everywhere we look, each person looks different from the next with unique fingerprints and DNA molecules even within the same community, and when people from different nations and cultures come together, linguistic and cultural

differences become even more pronounced. And yet, cosmopolitanism tries to emphasize the shared and the common despite all the evident and obvious differences, and the study of world literature, the deep understanding of very different literary works, especially canonical works that represent the values of different traditions and cultures, would be an effective way to bring together what seem to be so foreign and different, and thus help the chance of formulating the cosmopolitan vision. Goethe saw that possibility at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and in our time of global connectedness today, we have the opportunity to accomplish what Goethe called for, to usher in the epoch of *Weltliteratur*.

With many telling examples, David Damrosch has shown us very effectively how "nationalism of the national literary traditions was never as watertight as nationalistic literary histories have often supposed." National literature tends to include only writers and works in the national language and tradition, and not foreign works and translations, even though these foreign works may actually have a greater influence on writers of that national tradition than some of their fellow writers in the same language. Laurence Sterne drew much more inspiration from Rabelais and Cervantes than from earlier English works like *Beowulf* or *The Canterbury Tales*. In China, we mostly think of translation and influence of foreign literature in the twentieth century, but there are fascinating and surprising literary connections in much earlier times. For example, in a ninth-century Tang dynasty collection of fantastic tales, Duan Chengshi's 段成式 (803?–863) *Youyang zazu* 酉阳杂俎 or *Miscellaneous Morsels of Youyang*, we find a version of the Cinderella story with all the essential elements: a beautiful young girl suffers mistreatment by her stepmother; she goes to a party in a pair of "golden shoes (金履)," which are "light as hair and soundless when stepping on stones (其轻如毛, 履石无声)"; she lost one shoe in her haste to rush home; the king trying in vain to find the girl whose foot would fit the shoe; and finally the happy ending when she was found to be the owner of that shoe, and she "walked in those shoes, as beautiful as a being from heaven (蹑履而进, 色若天人)."[28] The eminent translator Yang Xianyi 杨宪益 observes that "this story is obviously the Cinderella story of the West." The girl is called in Chinese Ye Xian 叶限, which, Yang argues, is a transliteration of "the Anglo-Saxon *Aescen*, and the Sanskrit *Asan*," with the same meaning as the English Ashes. English versions of the story are mostly based on

French texts, and Cinderella in English versions wears glass shoes. This is a mistranslation, says Yang, "because the French version has shoes made of hair (*vair*), which the English translator misunderstood as glass (*verre*). Though the Chinese version says 'golden shoes,' it also describes them as 'light as hair and soundless when stepping on stones,' so apparently they are originally made of hair."[29] How could the Cinderella story appear in a Chinese book as early as the ninth century? How did the story get there, and what was the trajectory of its meandering journeys and adventurous transformations in the remote past we know so little about? Here we are not interested in how the Chinese version predated the French Charles Perrault (1697) or the German Grimm brothers (1812) by 1000 years, and how, in any case, the Chinese version originated in a foreign land to the West, probably India or the modern-day Middle East. What is fascinating is that peoples and cultures had such unexpected global connections way before our own time of globalization, and that cross-cultural exchange and communication happened much earlier and on a much larger scale than we might think. The world had long been connected in cultural terms before we thought of world literature.

But ours is probably the more propitious time for the rise of world literature, because we are living in a world that is fast changing, and there are undeniable correlations between the literary and cultural side of world affairs and the economic side. As I have discussed above, the critique of Eurocentrism forms an important background for the interest in the non-Western world and the revival of Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur*. At the same time, there is also much talk about the boom of the Asian economy and the ascendance of the global South, particularly the rise of China in the world economy and politics. While a truly global perspective on world literature needs to break away from the bias of Eurocentrism, it is also important to guard against narrow-minded nationalism in the other parts of the world, for example in China, especially when its economic and political power grows and plays an increasingly significant role in world affairs. The point of going beyond Eurocentrism is not to replace it with Sinocentrism or any other ethnocentrism. And in this context, we may emphasize yet again the importance of the cosmopolitan vision, which opens our eyes and hearts to embrace not just our own literature and culture, but those of the world as a whole. That is a task for all of us to achieve at the present time.

References

1. David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003 ; *Teaching World Literature*, ed. by David Damrosch, New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009 ; Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004; Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, *Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literatures*, New York: Continuum, 2008; *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*, ed. by David Damrosch et al., 2nd ed., New York: Longman, 2008; *The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, ed. by Paul Davis et al., New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010; *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*, ed. by Martin Puchner et al., 3rd ed., New York: Norton, 2013, Theo D'haen, *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature*, London: Routledge, 2011; *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. by Theo D'haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir, London: Routledge, 2012; Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading*, London: Verso, 2013; *World Literature in Theory*, ed. by David Damrosch, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014; Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, London: Verso, 2015.
2. Haun Saussy, "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares: Of Memes, Hives, and Selfish Genes," in: *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, ed. by H. Saussy, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, p. 12.
3. Terry Eagleton, "Postmodern Savages," in T. Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent: Critical Essays on Fish, Spivak, Žižek and Others*, London: Verso, 2005, p. 3.
4. Harish Trivedi, "*Panchadhatu:* Teaching English Literature in Indian Literary Context," in: H. Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India*, Calcutta: Papyrus, 1993, p. 229.
5. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Conversations with Eckermann on *Weltliteratur* (1827)," trans. by John Oxenford, in: *World Literature in Theory*, ed. by David Damrosch, Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014, pp. 19–20.
6. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, New York: Norton, 2006, p. xv.
7. Ibid., p. xvi.
8. Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, Paris: Éditions Garniers Frères, 1961, p. 154; quoted in Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, p. 155.
9. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, p. 156.
10. Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, trans. by David Coward, chapter 53, Toxicology, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 528.

11. Viscount de Chateaubriand, *The Genius of Christianity; or the Spirit and Beauty of the Christian Religion*, trans. by Charles I. White, Baltimore: John Murphy and Co., 1856, p. 188; quoted in Carlo Ginzburg, "Killing a Chinese Mandarin: The Moral Implications of Distance," *Critical Inquiry* 21:1 (Autumn 1994), pp. 53–54.
12. In addition to the French writers mentioned here, the metaphor of "killing a mandarin" also appears in the works of the Portuguese writer Eça de Queirós and the English writer Arnold Bennett. For a fuller discussion, see my essay, "Crossroads, Distant Killing, and Translation: On the Ethics and Politics of Comparison," in Zhang Longxi, *From Comparison to World Literature*, New York: SUNY Press, 2015, esp. pp. 18–24.
13. Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," in: *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 3, Spring 1972, p. 231; quoted in Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, p. 158.
14. 焦循 (Jiao Xun, 1764–1820): "孟子正义" *The Correct Meaning of the Mencius*, in vol. 1 of "诸子集成" *Collection of Masters Writings*, 8 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1954), iii.6, p. 138.
15. René Étiemble, "Should We Rethink the Notion of World Literature?", in: *World Literature in Theory*, ed. by Damrosch,1974 p. 88.
16. Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000) *and* "More Conjectures (2003)", ibid, p. 160.
17. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 46–47.
18. Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000) and "More Conjectures (2003)", in: *World Literature in Theory*, ed. by Damrosch, p. 160.
19. David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 4.
20. This was widely quoted in China in the 1950s and 1960s, and its source is a commemoration piece written by Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, originally published as "Karl Marx, Persönliche Erinnerungen (September 1890)" in *Die Neue Zeit*, available online at Marxists' Internet Archive. Accessed at https://www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/lafargue/1890/09/marx.htm, August 28, 2015.
21. Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?,* p. 5.
22. Gregory Nagy, "Early Greek Views of Poets and Poetry," in: *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 1, *Classical Criticism*, ed. by George A. Kennedy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 1.
23. "萧统·文选序" *Preface to the Selection of Refined Literature*, in "中国历代文论选" *Selection of Chinese Literary Criticism from Various Dynasties*, 4 vols., eds. By 郭绍虞 (Guo Shaoyu) and 王文生 (Wang Wensheng), Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1980, 1:330.

24. R. S. Pathak, *Comparative Poetics*, New Delhi: Creative Books, 1998, p. 99.
25. Barbara Stoler Miller, "The Imaginative Universe of Indian Literature," in: *Masterworks of Asian Literature in Comparative Perspective: A Guide for Teaching*, ed. by Barbara S. Miller, Armonk, New York: Sharpe, 1994, p. 5.
26. Sheldon Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out," in: *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. by Sheldon Pollock, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, p. 62.
27. Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 165.
28. 段成式: "酉阳杂俎" Duan Chengshi, *Miscellaneous Morsels of Youyang*, ed. by 方南生 (Fang Nansheng), Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981, p. 200, 201.
29. 杨宪益: "中国的扫灰娘故事" Yang Xianyi, "The Chinese Cinderella Story," in "译余偶拾" *Occasional Gleanings from Translation Work*, Jinan: Shandong huabao chubanshe, 2006, p. 66.



CHAPTER 8

Four Perspectives on World Literature: Reader, Producer, Text and System

Matthias Freise

The central question of the summit dialogue on world literature, which was held in Beijing, was on the relation between the universal and the local. This question implicates that the phenomenon of world literature could be seen from a relational instead of from an essentialist perspective. Hence I would like to state that in order to understand what world literature is we have to understand it generally as a network of relations, not as a set of objects, for instance a set of literary texts. A central but not the only axis of these relations is the tension between the universal and the local. Objects we classify, while relations we discern as belonging to different types of relations. From this disparity, diverging approaches to the problem of world literature emerge. Understanding world literature as a relation allows us to comprehend its processual character. World literature does not exist, but takes place.

In the following, I will try to provide a relational approach to world literature with some emphasis on the tension between the universal and the local. Such a relational approach makes it necessary to discern different focuses on the relation in which world literature takes place. These four

M. Freise (✉)
Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Göttingen, Germany
e-mail: mfreise@gwdg.de

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_8

focuses I will discuss subsequently. The first and most obvious focus is the reader's perspective. Most debate on world literature is limited to it. Goethe, however, most likely did not have the reader's focus in mind when he coined the term world literature, but rather the producer's focus. I call the producer's focus the second possible focus on world literature. What does it mean to produce world literature or literature for the (whole?) world? How can a producer of literature deal with world literature? How is he or she connected to world literature?

There are, however, two more focuses on world literature. They are not held individually, but systematically; namely, by the single work of literature and by the literary system as a whole. According to Yury Tynjanov ("On Literary Evolution"),[1] a work of literature simultaneously has an auto-function and a syn-function. From the perspective of auto-function, a work of art is a semantic system by itself, while from the perspective of syn-function, it is just one element in a superior system—the system of literature as a whole. These points of view imply different understandings of what world literature is. From the point of view of auto-function, world literature has to be found within a particular literary text, as a quality of this text. From the point of view of syn-function, world literature is a quality of the whole system of literature. Both perspectives are not only possible, but also necessary, in order to understand what world literature, seen as a relation, may be. The auto-functional view is essential, since literature, and therefore also world literature, can be found only in the texts themselves. When literary scholarship finally turns its attention from critical theories back to literature itself, it will be obvious that world literature is first and foremost a quality of a literary text. Especially for our understanding of the phenomenon of world literature as expressing the tension between the global and the local, the syn-functional view of literature is also essential, because this tension is a problem of the literary system as a whole.

World Literature from the Reader's Perspective

Let us begin with the most common perspective on world literature, the reader's perspective. Many disputes arise from the fact that from a reader's perspective, the term "world literature" is fundamentally equivocal. On the one hand, it is a quantitative term, which encompasses all literatures or even all works of literature of the world. On the other hand, "world literature" is a qualitative term, which designates texts of a particular quality, by which they qualify for being texts of world literature. World literature,

then, would be a modern version of the "Parnassus" of antiquity. Obviously, on this Parnassus there is not enough room for all works of literature from all times and from all countries. Therefore, the quantitative and the qualitative understandings of world literature are, at least partially, incompatible.

It might be objected that, as has been stated by Hegel, quantity at a certain level might turn into quality. In terms of literature, this argument would draw upon parameters like numbers of sold copies or numbers of translations into other languages. However, this is not what Hegel meant. Massive reading practice can turn reading from quantity into quality, just as mass tourism changes tourism and mass use of cars changes the quality of traffic. However, the number of readers or translations does not change the book. The only valid connection between the quantity of reading and the book itself is the function of the book. World literature has a function for readers. In social history, the reading of world literature had the social function of showing refinement and of belonging to the elite, as in Britain at the turn from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, when the reading of classical Greek and Latin literature ensured the belonging to the national elite.

This function, however, has recently lost its effect. We do not qualify being highbrow by reading any more. Maybe this is why the term "world literature" has come back into discussion. It has lost its functional basis. However, a new one could be derived from the fact that the term "world literature" has changed its meaning. It has shifted away from readings of Western imperial literature, towards readings especially of non-Western literatures, in analogy to the popularity of listening to "world music." In consequence, the related new social function of reading world literature would be that readers of world literature are now expected to be able to enter distant social and cultural contexts, to see them from within. In other words, they are expected to be capable of cultural empathy. Therefore, if we talk about world literature, it is important to clarify whether we talk about it in the old or in the new sense. The new function of world literature implies new strategies for readers. However, before you decide to read literature exclusively from most distant cultures, there is one important precondition. Because it is a relationship, empathy is possible only on the basis of your own highly developed social or cultural identity. Without such an identity, when getting into distant social or cultural contexts, your attitude most likely turns into identification. Strictly speaking, identification is not a relationship, because you dissolve in the new context you have entered. Therefore, if you start to identify with

Kirghiz culture after having read Chinghiz Aitmatov's *The White Steamboat*, you certainly miss the book's world literature quality. This quality is accessible only if you also live your own culture, also read your own literature, whatever it might be. Only then, through reading *The White Steamboat*, are you able to establish a relationship to Kirghiz culture, which might become intensive and long lasting.

One consequence of this new social function of world literature is, however, that if you are Kirghiz and read only Aitmatov, or if you are American and read only Mark Twain, even if you are English and read only Shakespeare, you will not develop an understanding of world literature in the new sense, because these readings, no matter how prominent the books you read might be, do not require cultural empathy and therefore allow only identification. Classics from your own culture you perceive as being national or domestic. When you read them only, you are unable to imagine what Shakespeare would look like through Kirghiz eyes, and therefore you lack the double perspective which is necessary for an empathic view of world literature. In many countries, unfortunately including Germany, teaching literature in school is limited to the literary heritage written in the national language. This says nothing against Goethe, but even though teaching his works in schools in Germany is no longer concentrated on the expression of "*Germanness*" in his work, German guidelines for literature classes on Goethe still lack a truly world literature perspective on him. They concentrate on thematic values in his writings, which seem to be "universal," but they fail to explain why this is world literature in the qualitative sense, because they do not reconstruct the international literary network Goethe's writings are embedded in.

As soon as you get into at least one foreign literary culture, the canonical status of texts does not seem as self-evident as in the national perspective. In his novel *Ferdydurke*, the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz mocks literature classes in pre-war Poland. The correct answer to the question "why should we love the poet Juliusz Słowacki" is "because he was a prophet."[2] This is mere identification. As we will see later, Gombrowicz, whose work has become compulsory reading in Polish literature classes in the meantime, managed to escape from becoming another "prophet" for the Polish people exactly through displacement into an alien culture.

A second prerequisite for a concept and an understanding of world literature from the reader's perspective is a particular practice of reading. In Jean-Paul Sartre's novel *Nausea*, the first-person narrator gets into conversation with the autodidact, who reads through literature in alphabetical order. The autodidact tries to remember a book he has read:

> "Monsieur, I can't remember the author's name any more. I sometimes have these lapses of memory. N… No… Nod…" "Impossible," I tell him quickly, "you've only got up to *Lavergne*. […] his face falls and thick lips jut out as if he were about to cry."[3]

There are two things to learn from this passage. First, knowledge accumulation is not a good reason to read world literature. The knowledge which is actually needed is always the one book you haven't read as yet. Secondly, reading is a network of the exploring practice. If you do not follow the synapses of this network when going from text to text, the knowledge you hope to accumulate is useless, because without the passages that the synapses provide, you will not establish equivalent synapses in your brain. These synapses are necessary not only for memorizing your readings, but also for establishing a semantic network, which is the representation of world literature in your mind.

We learn from Sartre that, from a qualitative reader's perspective, world literature is not a collection of texts from many countries, but a multipolar semantic space forming a huge field of semantic gravity through which the reader may move. This conclusion is supported by the fact that it is not by chance that we use the term world literature in the singular. World literature is not a plurality, but a field, within which everything is interconnected.

Moreover, to experience world literature qualitatively, you should not experience the texts you read on the level of pragmatics, but on the level of semantics. What does this mean? On the level of pragmatics, everything in the text is connected with each other as it would be connected in reality. X loves Y, but hates Z. A gun hanging on the wall will be taken by someone in order to shoot at someone or something. These rules, known as "Chekhov's gun" and given as advice by Anton Chekhov in a letter to his friend Lazarev,[4] are in fact a trap. Lazarev would have learned from them to form logically consistent stories, but he would never have produced world literature like Chekhov himself. In Chekhov's stories there are many guns, from which no one shoots. They are not interconnected pragmatically but semantically. Literature lives from its semantic relations, which are independent of their pragmatics.

The qualitative argument, however, is not in the reader's hands. In terms of quality, readers can only *participate* in world literature, but through qualitative reading they can participate in it as a whole, no matter how many books they go through. In order to let the gravity waves of

world literature run through your mind, it is, however, not sufficient to touch its canvas at one end. Similar to electricity, the canvas of literary form and the field of literary semantics have at least to be touched at two distant points to let energy run.

World Literature from the Producer's Perspective

For producers, as well as for readers, the term "world literature" has a quantitative and a qualitative aspect. The quantitative aspect lies in the literature market. For producers, literature quantitatively is a product. The world market of literature is, not surprisingly, dominated by the English language. Therefore, from a quantitative point of view, world literature production is production of texts in English. However, we should refrain from the claim that literature gains the status of world literature only through translation into English or through the author's change to the English language. The material of literature is language, and to administer a change of language is as if you demand that a literary author become a musical composer. Translation can succeed, if the work we translate is more made out of narrative than out of language devices. Few *émigré* writers changed the language they employed as writers. The notoriously mentioned Vladimir Nabokov had an English nanny during his childhood. The majority of migrant writers were rather in despair because they were losing the freshness of their language.

Those who did not fall silent chose the path of quality rather than quantity. They did not drop their domestic culture and mother tongue, but created an interference of the semantic gravity waves from different cultural zones. For instance, Gombrowicz, who emigrated from Poland to Argentina in 1939, played on Polish provincialism and on "displaced topics" in a completely alien environment, which caused the most welcome grotesque effects. The fictional showdown between the "most esteemed Polish writer" Gombrowicz and the "most esteemed Argentinian writer" Borges in the novel *Trans-Atlantyk* is one of the funniest scenes of world literature in the second half of the twentieth century. Trans-national hybridization made Gombrowicz, ironically enough together with Borges, a predecessor of post-modernism. Therefore, from the producers' point of view, a qualitative understanding of world literature is based on the alchemy of hybridization. Authors don't have to *write* in a different language, but they should be able to *read* in as many languages as possible to make encounter operative. This is their task, not the task of the readers.

Authors do the hard cultural work for all of us. If, for instance, Rainer Maria Rilke had not known French and Russian that well, he would not have expanded the possibilities of German poetry.

Maybe the transgressive ability of authors has its limits? Here, it is time to talk about Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars*, which has been blamed by David Damrosch for supposedly feigning cultural transgression while in fact smuggling in Serbian nationalism.[5] Damrosch's approach is most ambivalent. At the same time, he refutes and approves the book's claim to be world literature. By calling *The Dictionary of the Khazars* a poisoned book, he picks up a metaphor which the book itself provides on its meta-fictional level. However, according to Damrosch, the book is not only fictionally but literally poisoned, because behind its multiple perspectives and trans-cultural façade lurks the propaganda of Serbian nationalism, which was about to destroy the multi-ethnic paradise of Tito's Yugoslavia. International readers who praised the book's multi-culturalism were blind to this "local" dimension of it.

For both of us, Damrosch and me, it is dangerous to get into the proverbial Balkan dissonances, but he served the ball into this field and I, being a scholar of Slavic literatures, cannot refrain from returning it. So let's look at Damrosch's argument a little closer. He provides (a) nationalist statements in Pavić's essays and on his homepage. Yes, Pavić was an avowed Serbian nationalist; similar, by the way, to Dostoevsky, who was an avowed Russian nationalist. Dostoevsky's novels are full of stereotypic Poles and Germans as minor characters. Nevertheless, Polish and German readers have always been enthusiastic about Dostoevsky as a writer. Polish émigré writer Czesław Miłosz, teaching Slavic literatures at Berkeley, taught only Polish literature, with one exception—Dostoevsky. Was he and are we all unaware of the nationalistic poison which Dostoevsky's novels contain? Is this poison hidden under the sugar icing of metaphysics? Not at all. On the contrary, the use which is actually made of his work by Russian neo-nationalists irritates enthusiasts of Dostoevsky around the world.

Damrosch cites (b) from Pavić's poem "Monument to an Unknown Poet" the first line, "My eyes are full of blood and wine like plaster on Athos' walls," and the penultimate line, "But my heart has tasted the rock of your homeland and found in it the flavor of hearth."[6] From them he concludes that Pavić is a follower of "the pre-Nazi tradition of blood and soil, symbols of ethnic rootedness typically mobilized against Jews and other newcomers […]."[7] This is, first, not a text from the *Dictionary* and therefore cannot prove the novel's political message and, second,

does not convince me as an interpretation of the cited poem. “Blood” in the pre-Nazi and Nazi ideology is a metaphor for race or descent. In the poem, however, blood through the doubling with wine and through the comparison with plaster on Athos’ walls connotes Christ’s sacrifice, and alludes to the Old Serbian epic “The Maiden of the Blackbird Field,” where the defeat of the Serbian warriors who were taking a stand against the Ottoman army is symbolized as the Lord’s Supper.

Damrosch (c) concedes that the *Dictionary* treats Judaism with insight and sympathy. But, as it “implicitly identifies the Serbs with the Jews,” it turns out that it does so merely to usurp Jewish victimhood. He (d) reads the *Dictionary* partially as a *roman à clef* that encrypts political statements like that which is saying that the national identity of states on the periphery of Serbia (not of the Yugoslav Federation![8]) was merely invented, and that the Serbs were exploited by the minor members of the Federation. This is correct, but reading a text as a *roman à clef* makes its semantics one-dimensional. A multi-dimensional fictional text is transformed into a one-to-one representation of reality. In his play “The Wedding,” Stanisław Wyspiański reportedly portrayed his friend’s wedding feast, and the premiere of the play was a big scandal, because the friend disliked the portrait. Nowadays the scandal is forgotten, but “The Wedding” emerged as Wyspiański’s literary masterpiece because of its enormous semantic potential beyond portraying.

The bottom line of Damrosch’s argument on *The Dictionary of the Khazars* is that its naïve international readers have been blind to its “local” nationalist undercurrent, and therefore they unconsciously absorbed the poison of Serbian nationalism. This nationalism is blamed by Damrosch as responsible for the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Here it must be noted that Yugoslavia was, despite the fact that Tito was a Croatian, a fulfillment of Greater Serbian dreams. This is why it fell apart, not from its Serbian heart, but from its non-Serbian periphery. Serbs would not have dreamed of a destruction of Yugoslavia; they fought against it. The dream of the Western Balkan peoples to form a confederation of equals had never been achieved. In 1918, when the kingdom of Yugoslavia was formed, the Croatian poet Miroslav Krleža, later a close friend of Tito, commented:

> The whore Croatia could not exist without a hustler. Giving the brush-off to Austria, she immediately threw herself at Serbia.[9]

Pavić himself, in his novel, opposes a non-poisoned silver-locked copy of the *Dictionary of the Khazars* to a golden-locked poisoned copy of it. In the fictional world of the novel, one has to decide which copy to open. On the level of meta-fiction, which in the novel is constantly present, we understand that all fiction can be understood in a poisoned and in a non-poisoned way. The poisoned golden copy of fiction contains convictions and ideology, the stereotypes and clichés personally held by the author.

The non-poisoned silver copy of fiction contains its semantic space. The meta-fictional meaning of the two copies can be proved by an analysis of Pavić's description of the circumstances of their respective reading. Hence, why do the readers of the poisoned copy die exactly when they read the Latin phrase "verbum caro factum est" (The word became flesh)? Because if you read the golden-locked copy, you read the literal, the "flesh" meaning of the book, the "sensus literalis" in medieval Scripture reception theory. This reading provides facts, opinions and social reality. The poisoned copy of Dante's *Divine Comedy* contains the malediction of his enemies, whom he, with great pleasure, allows to be tortured in the inferno. Dante himself stated that his epos, like Scripture, allows four fundamentally different readings. Why not Pavić's *Dictionary*?[10] Its "flesh" copy poisons naïve readers with nationalist ideology. The Latin phrase in it, however, means: attention, your reading is poisoned. On the other hand, the non-poisoned silver-locked copy of the book, according to Pavić, "enabled one to know when death would strike." It contains the phrase "when you awake and suffer no pain, know that you are no longer among the living." What exactly is happening here? The paradox of "dead awakening" without pain points to resurrection. Indeed, the semantic space is the space into which we resurrect. In Heidegger's *Being and Time*, the pragmatic space (Seiendes) has to break down before the semantic space (Sein) can open up. We have to die a symbolic death before we can enter the world of meaning, the semantic world. Pavić's book will not poison us only when we transcend its pragmatic message concerning Yugoslav conflicts. The silver-locked copy therefore seems to contain the "sensus mysticus" of Scripture reception theory.[11] It opens up the semantic space, which makes *The Dictionary of the Khazars* a part of world literature in the qualitative sense.

Which copy of the *Dictionary* did Damrosch himself open? Because he unmasks the nationalistic subtext instead of falling victim to its poison, he claims to have opened the silver-locked copy.[12] However, within the metafictional logics of the book itself, Damrosch nevertheless opened the

golden-locked poisoned copy, because he himself, starting from the words of *The Dictionary of the Khazars*, turned these words into the flesh of Yugoslav reality. He does not realize that the poisoned copy is not the book itself but a mode of its reading. His mode of reading is on the literal level. Different from the fourth, prophetic level, this is the one which is poisoned. Damrosch of course opened the poisoned copy of the book for other reasons than Russian nationalists deciding to reopen the poisoned copies of Dostoevsky's novels. Both were in search of ideology—he to unmask it, they to reinstall it. Damrosch, coming upon the phrase "verbum caro factum est," should have realized the warning and changed to the non-flesh, silver copy of the book.

Therefore, in the producer's perspective, as in the reader's perspective, the term "world literature" requires a choice between a pragmatic and a semantic encoding of literature. The pragmatic code produces the poisoned golden-locked copy, and the semantic code produces the revealing silver-locked copy of literature. How seriously Pavić takes the difference between semantics and pragmatics, the following fact demonstrates. As soon as the three persons from different cultural contexts, who dream about the different parts of the dictionary and also dream about each other, meet in reality, they immediately have to die. Pragmatic contact leads to semantic short cut, and the semantic space implodes. Semantics must be dreamed. We should not transform them into the flesh of reality.

World Literature from a Textual Perspective

Why should a single literary text have a point of view on world literature on its own? Well, it is the text which embodies whatever might be world literature. It *is*, strictly speaking, world literature. Therefore, literary scholarship should be able to find world literature first of all within the micro-cosmos of one literary text. As a micro-cosmos, the text establishes relation as such, and by doing so it makes out of the world a relational space. If read semantically, it provides a collecting lens for the world, which makes the world ascertainable, as in the riddle about the tiny window through which the whole world can pass. With the help of a famous fragment from a letter, written by Anton Chekhov to his brother Aleksandr on May 10, 1886, we will explore the function a single literary text is able to play for our understanding of world literature. Here is the fragment:

> You will capture the truth of a moonlit night if you'll write that a gleam like starlight shone from the pieces of a broken bottle.[13]

This advice to Aleksandr seems to contradict the advice he gave concerning the plot function of a detail (Chekhov's gun). In the play "The Seagull," where Anton himself uses the detail of the broken bottle, there is no pragmatic justification of it: no one drank from the bottle, and no one will cut his foot in stepping into the shards. For us, however, there is a lesson to learn from this statement. Only by getting into the microscopic detail do you have a chance to create the whole of a fictive world. The whole is only in the fragment, the global is only in the local. Don't try to describe the whole of a scene, don't try to generalize. The reason for that is that truth right from the beginning needs not quantity but quality. Truth? For my purpose, I define truth simply as the crossing of all semantic relations in which an object is involved. Because literature is able to realize a maximum of such relations, it produces truth.

What does this mean for our understanding of a single text as realized world literature? A text belongs to world literature when it is able to express truth by braiding together the semantic beams from the starry sky of world literature. The consequence for the question of what is world literature is the following: don't try to describe world literature as a whole, don't try to generalize. You miss its truth, that is, its interconnectedness, which is the main prerequisite for the existence of world literature—not as a sum of texts, but as a whole, thoroughly semantic body of texts.

This is what the image of the shards of a broken bottle reflecting moonlight and starlight expresses on the level of meta-fiction. The shards serve as focusing reflectors for the light. The secret of how the whole of a setting is not only represented but "true" in microscopic detail is obvious: without a focusing reflector there is no seeing at all. This function is realized in the image of the shard, which usually forms a convex mirror. The broken bottle, containing the whole of the starry sky by collecting it and transforming it into one beam of light, is not only an example of good literary technique, but also a realized meta-fictional symbol. As no one will explore all stars of the universe, no one will read through the multitude of world literature texts, not even through those which are in the part of the literary cosmos which is roughly known to us. It is the piece of a broken bottle that distills all the light from scattered starlight, just as in Shakespeare's famous sonnet the smell of the whole summer is present in a drop of distilled liquor. The broken bottle also collects all of a man's biography as well as the anthropography of humankind. It is a broken bottle, which is finally left from a Chekhovian life of broken illusions, and it is shards which are left from humankind's most distant history.

This is also the secret hidden behind Chekhov's gun. The semantically active detail does not need any shot to come out of it. On the contrary, it swallows up all shots which by any chance it may release in a given situation. In the same way, a work of literary art ultimately swallows up the whole semantic cosmos of world literature.

On the qualitative level, a literary text is the focusing reflector of world literature's imagery, myths, paradoxes, dreams, rhetoric and style. It is precisely this reflection which makes world literature become a qualitative reality. This reflection is totally different from the Marxist postulate that literature should "reflect" reality. The metaphor of Marxist reflection theory is a plain mirror, while the reflection Chekhov has in mind is convex. His mirror *collects* the light and produces out of it a laser beam of high semantic energy, which is able to penetrate you. With this beam, a single work of art provides access to world literature for its reader. It beams him/her into the semantic hyperspace of world literature.

What follows from this with regard to our question about the tension between the local and the universal? In general, that the universal, if it is not just abstraction, can only exist in the local. You need a location where plots and semantic relations cross. The plots and the semantic relations import the universal into the local and make it appear. In the case of *The Dictionary of the Khazars*, the Balkans, being the border zone of Muslim, Orthodox and Roman Catholic beliefs, is the particular place where it must be located. The Khazar people represent the failed utopia of a unification of these three identities. Therefore, the novel does not get along without Serbian self-perception, but this self-perception is a convex mirror, which collects all aspects of a globalizing world—melted together and separated, nationalist and internationalist. The Balkans are a laboratory, which exemplifies the successes and failures of supranational identities.

World Literature from a System Perspective

Functionally related to the social system as a whole, the system of literature reduces conflict on the outside by producing conflict within the secluded semantic space of the fictional world. Literature is a system, which homogenizes the world outside the system by transforming conflict into its own semantic space. From a system point of view, literature is a strategy of conflict resolution. In psychology, this process is known as internalization, which leads to external harmony by producing internal conflict. World literature, therefore, is the process of promoting harmony

between peoples by the internalization of conflicts between them into the semantic space of literary texts. Conflict is encapsulated in literature, and by encapsulating conflict, literary texts become symbols of the culture arising from the solution of a conflict. The *Iliad* is the literary encapsulation of the conflict between Europe and Asia Minor in the Ancient world and therefore became the symbol of Magna Graecia, which arose from it.

Let's put the rule to a test by discussing once more Davis Damrosch's example, *The Dictionary of the Khazars*, in the light of the system function of literature. Yugoslavia has been a multi-language, multi-ethnic, multi-religious state, held together not by common cultural history or by cultural symbols, which might have turned its conflicts into semantic tension, but by the power and will of a strong leader, Josip Broz Tito. I agree with Damrosch that it was not by chance that Pavić wrote his book in the short period between Tito's death and the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Damrosch takes this as a clue that Pavić promoted or even abetted the disintegration of Yugoslavia, but we should consider the possibility of an alternative interpretation. The main event of the book is the Khazars' conversion to Jewish belief. What made this a unique case in cultural history is that the Khazar kaghan did not choose the most progressive religion, but, on the contrary, the most archaic.

From a system perspective, the most archaic religion is the most integrative one, and it could have been believed to be able to settle external conflicts. Transposing this to Yugoslavia in the twentieth century, Pavić could have had in mind that this conglomerate of religions and traditions failed to create a symbol, which would express and thereby encapsulate its enormous potential for conflict—not even the partisan war against Nazi occupation was valid and sufficient for such a symbolic representation of Yugoslav identity. Pavić could have planned his book as an attempt that was much too late, or at least as an appeal, to create such a symbol. The Yugoslav heteroglossia never had a chance to be integrated into one plot—Ivo Andrić tried, but even though the Nobel Prize was awarded for *The Bridge on the Drina*, he failed to build with this book a sustainable cultural bridge between Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia. In the absence of one plot for all Yugoslav identities, only a paradigm of several plots, similar to Pavić's dictionary, could have been imagined to be the integrative form for this state, which nevertheless ceased to exist soon after.

This idea of course needs a deeper analysis of Pavić's book, which cannot be the task of this chapter. I would like to note, however, that our understanding of world literature from a system perspective should include

the ability of literature for social and political integration by transforming conflict into a symbol. This is the cultural aspect of globalization. Globalization so far has taken place only in the sphere of economy. We are in need of real *whole-world authors*, who equip us with symbols of our conflicts with the help of which we can encapsulate them into semantic tension. It is only then that a qualitative cultural globalization would be able to arise. The debate on colonialism does not seem to promote this development as long as there are still offenders and victims in this debate. The *Iliad*, for example, is not a tale of offenders and victims. World literature does not define offenders and victims. If it did so, it would not be able to encapsulate conflict. Which story will tell the Iliad of globalization? Who will create its myth? What will be its form? Maybe it will be some kind of dictionary, allegedly written by the diviner of a tribe of *Homo sapiens* that decided to leave the highlands of Abyssinia and spread over the globe. Jack London's *Before Adam* is not this myth, nor is Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Both stories root our human identity in deadly aggression. These stories were myths of the twentieth century, myths of the self-destruction of humankind.

It has been mentioned by cultural theory that culture, and with it literature, flourishes on the borders and not in the center of a society. From a world literature point of view, a border is not the line where cultures clash, but the zone where semantic raw material arises like lava from deep ocean trenches. Maintaining the image, I would say that this raw material, which rises out of the cultural trenches of the global semiosphere, will enable us to encapsulate our conflicts. This lava is migration. We do not know why *Homo sapiens* left Abyssinia. But he is still on his way.

References

1. In: *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. by Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska, intro. by Gerald L. Bruns, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1962, pp. 66–78.
2. Witold Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, transl. by Danuta Borchardt, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 42.
3. Sartre, Jean Paul: *Nausea*, Harmondsworth (Penguin modern classics) 1965, pp. 55–56.
4. Anton Chekhov, "Letter to Aleksandr Semenovich Lazarev (pseudonym of A. S. Gruzinsky), 1 November 1889", in: A. Chekhov, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii Pisem v tridsatitomakh, Pis'ma*, vol. 3, Moscow, 1976, p. 273.

5. David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, pp. 260–279: Chapter "The poisoned book".
6. In the original "Spomenik Neznanom Pjesniku," first published in 1967, which I cite from *Sabrana dela Milorada Pavića*, vol. 7, Beograd: Prosveta, 1990, p. 27–28, we read "укус огња," which translates correctly as "taste of fire." "Hearth" therefore is a high-handed interpretation by the translator into English with serious consequences for Damrosch's reading. Furthermore, the passage cited by Damrosch can be understood only through its ties within the paradigm of five-times-repeated "but my heart…", following "my eyes…," "my ears…," "my tongue…," "my legs…" and again "my tongue…," respectively. It is misleading to cite isolated lines from poems.
7. Damrosch, p. 270.
8. Damrosch imputes an allegoric statement on the relations between Serbs and other nationalities in Yugoslavia. The "nation in the north," however, is part of the "biggest part of the Khazarian Empire" (meaning Serbia within the Yugoslav Federation). In this part "live only Khazars" (i.e., Serbs), but only one district of this part was called Khazaria (i.e., Serbia), while "the other districts" (i.e., the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo) "had different names" (cf. pp. 141–142 in Milorad Pavić, *Chazarski rečnik*, Beograd 1985, translation mine). Therefore, this entry is a statement on the relationships within the Serbian nation. One could argue about the status of A. P. Kosovo, where one finds not only Serbs but also Albanians. However, the Slavic nationality there was Serbian.
9. Miroslav Krleža: "Pijana Novembarska Noć 1918", In: M.K. *Davni dani*, Zagreb 1956, translation mine.
10. The novel itself alludes to the medieval theory of the four levels of understanding the Holy Writing. The entry "Al Bekri, Spanjard" differentiates between a first level of literal meaning (avam), a second level of allusion (kavas), a third level of occult meaning (avlija) and a fourth level of prophetic meaning (anbija). The first, literal meaning "Al Bekri does not take into account." Cf. pp. 101–102 in Milorad Pavić, *Chazarski rečnik*, Beograd 1985. Translation mine.
11. This is, according to *The Dictionary of the Khazars*, "the most appropriate or actual meaning, the spirit of the book." The Khazars themselves "foremost assume this highest level of a book." Cf. Note 10, ibid.
12. In his oral response to my paper at the Beijing summit.
13. A. Chekhov, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii i Pisem v tridsati tomakh, Pis'ma*, ed. by N. F. Belchikov et al., vol. 1, Moscow: Nauka, 1976, p. 242, "letter to Nikolaj Chekhov, 1 May 1886". Translation mine.



CHAPTER 9

A World of Translation

Philippe Ratte

There is no world literature, because there is no world as such. Quite the opposite, the world is a mesh of literatures, as we the people are too short-sighted to figure out more than meets the eye, unless literature produces extensions to the span of our vision. Literature is what stretches our imagination beyond the boundaries of each one's limited reach, thus producing the gist that there is matter outside the hurdles of our individual experience. Movies should, in that respect, be comprised in the concept of literature, since they too produce stories and display pictures that greatly contribute to expanding people's power to fancy the world at large. But written novels reach further, as they spark the imagination's power rather than feeding it, thus deepening the only thrust that turns our desperate human condition into a capacity to figure out a world further up.

There is no World in itself that literature should try to portray. There are zillions of windows opened by literature, through which more can be seen than one's experience captures. This "more" is the very substance the world is made of, very much like the Universe is mainly made of dark matter, peppered with scarce blinkering beacons. Each smallest bit of

P. Ratte (✉)
Paris, France

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_9

literature is therefore a sample of world literature, since it is one building brick of the "Greater Beyond," which is the only tantamount notion we can grasp from "The World" as such.

This is a key to grasping and enhancing human nature, as we are indeed made of that "more" to a much greater proportion than we are by what we regard as our "Self." The World is what we are woven from without being aware, just as the sky is a firmament of twinkling stars, even if the sun's brightness prevents us from noticing it in the daytime. Literature is what sheds darkness on our overshining self, thus allowing the stars which carpet the sky to be seen and admired. Of course, one will never encompass all the stars in one single vision, but noticing even a few lifts the mind to the understanding that the sun of one's Self is just a tiny spark of dust among myriads of heavenly candles. This is how literature produces the idea of a World, and namely the World.

Let us carve that idea deeper.

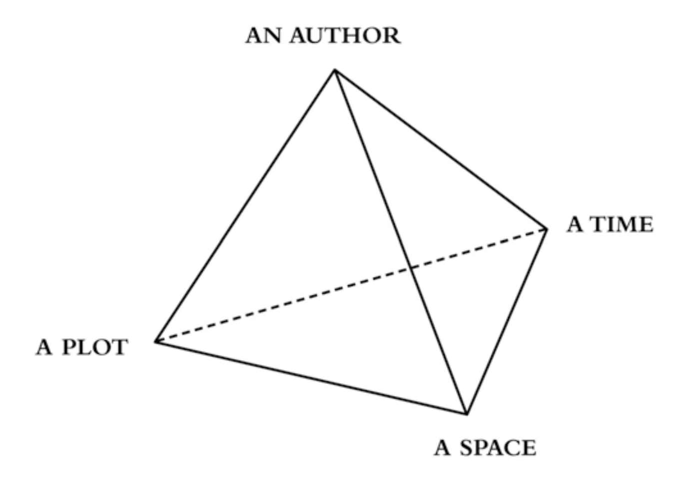
What do we mean by "literature," as opposed to written matter? One never fails to make the difference up front. Nobody would miss the cutting edge between a written piece of information and a text, even if the dividing line may slightly change from one person to another. But there is always a point beyond which one feels that the shift is happening between mere reading (or watching, in the case of movies) and getting involved.

A moving and subtle zone indeed, very much like the interface with the sea's waters on the strand, where you never really know whether you are still on the beach or already at sea, but where you do feel it, no matter whether your feet are wet or not. What makes such a difference so clear-cut when it comes to literature?

A Piece of Literature Is First and Foremost a Hollow Blown inside Matter

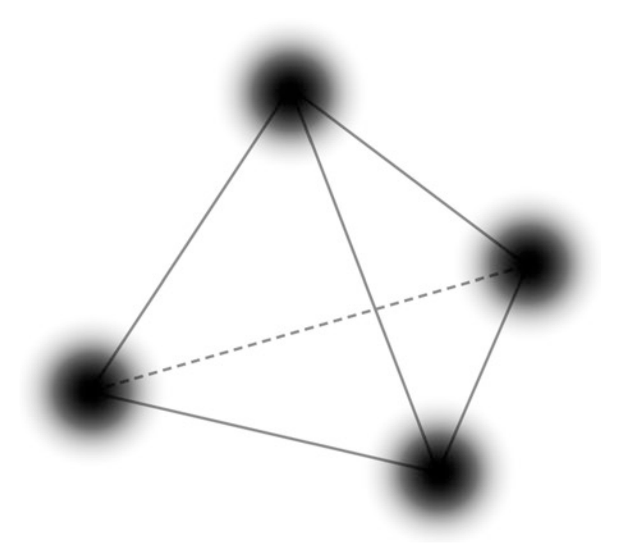
Literature is not merely telling stories with style. It actually results from the combination of four elements, which, put together, can be figured as the four angles (or apexes) of a tetrahedron.

Those four elements are *a space*, *a time*, *a plot* and *an author*.



What gives leverage to the image of the tetrahedron is the notion of *producing a volume* that it entails. **Literature is what is captured in that very volume**. Each of the four triangles made by three of the four elements can very well picture a type of writing—for example, a journalist will perfectly perform his or her duty if telling a plot framed in a given space and time; an author, with a space and a time, will produce poetry, or even a single haiku; an author with a plot and a time, or a plot and a space, will draft a scenario, adding respectively a space or a time. But there is no literature, unless all four angles meet to produce a volume inside which the breath of inspiration will whisper. The shape of the tetrahedron thus produced can greatly vary, expanding into whichever of the four directions the figure is made of. But even when stretched up to a quasi-linear slim shape along one main orientation, there must remain some volume inside to keep it within the realm of literature.

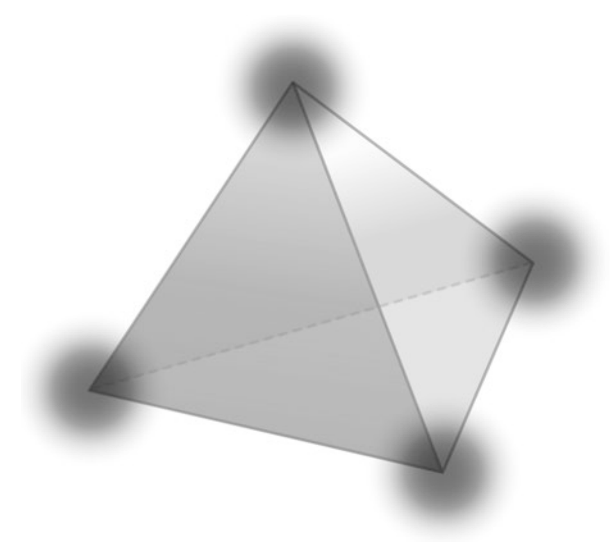
Moreover, each of the four apexes is by itself a very fuzzy spot: what is exactly a space, a time, a plot or even an author? All four are open-ended notions, which makes the tetrahedron a very virtual one, at least a non-geometrical one—a mere experience of thought.



Up to this point, we have defined literature as a volume, the borders of which cannot be precisely defined, but definitely a *volume*, carved out (or unfolded) by the combination of four elements.

Once Unfolded as a Volume, the Text Shapes Its Own Edge

This means that literature is not the outcome of a given combination of those four elements, but what gives them a mutual relationship. Once the book is written, that relationship cannot be changed any more, and this is where literature begins. It is not the tetrahedron that produces the volume, even if this is the beginning of scaffolding the masterpiece: it is the masterpiece that, at the end of the day (indeed the beginning of its own days), defines where all four elements stand against each other and what kind of figure they design as a whole. The volume produces its own edges.



Yet none of the apexes produced at the intersection of those edges is a clear-cut point: the *space* at stake remains widely undetermined, as it is only touched upon, even by authors who, like Balzac or Zola or, even more, Claude Simon, for example, take pride in describing it down to the slightest detail. The *time* called upon to revival by the story can only be alluded to, through a range of images and references, but will by nature remain widely in abeyance. The *plot* is more likely to be explicit, but no intrigue has ever been fully unraveled. There are always sides to any of the smallest stories that will forever remain blank, thus leaving the plot widely hazardous. And what about the *author*? (S)he has a life, works, interests, well beyond that which mirrors in a given book, and his (her) involvement in the novel is never a self-explaining one.

Literature is thus a blend of four elements, none of which can be fully defined nor even described, yet they build a volume which in fact ends up being the mold from which all four will draw their status. Take for example the moors and woods south of Bordeaux: their gist comes from Mauriac's novels. One cannot fancy the Middle Ages without a tinge of Sir Walter Scott's famous works. Murder will forever bear the print of Dostoevsky or Truman Capote, and so on.

While resulting from the combination of a space, a time, a plot and an author, each piece of literature blows the four of them away, keeping merely the spur of the edges that once joined those four apexes, as a last spoor of a preliminary layout, from which a hollow volume is left open for trapping the reader. Those four apexes did belong to a very precise location and context. But the pit they all four contribute to digging is part and parcel of what the World is made of: Elseness.

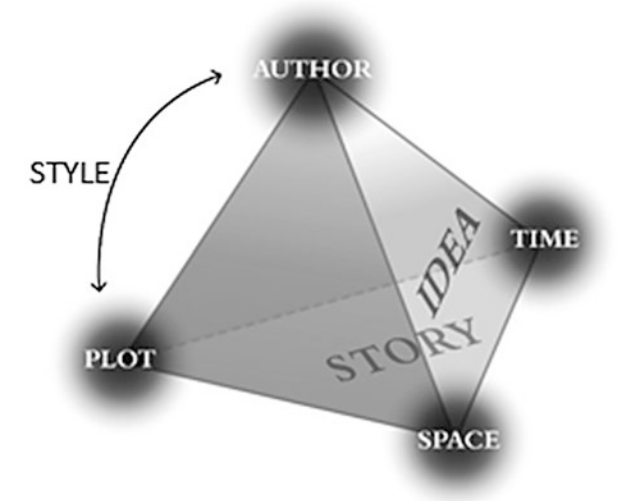
Style Is What Inflates the Volume Open

If all four apexes of the tetrahedron are fairly unstable, the edges can help fix the elusive concept of literature: obviously, plot, space and time design a highly intertwined triangle, as a given plot can only take place in a given space at a given time. There are no Indians raiding trains in ancient Rome. We may call that surface *the story*. Author, space and time design another triangle, the surface of which is woven by language and culture, with more language involved near the author's apex and more culture required to mesh space and time properly, but where language and culture cannot be fully disentangled from one another—there is no culture without a language to spell it out, and no language which is not soaked up with culture. Let us call that second triangle *the idea*.

Those two triangles can more or less fit upon one another, like the two parts of an oyster's shell, depending on whether the story and the idea roughly cover similar areas: a poor author will tell a story, the idea of which is just in the story, very much like a constable would report a fact. This will produce a meager contribution to literature, a simple tale. A sophisticated writer will on the contrary sculpt and checker hundreds of pages on some non-event, working out the idea to a dimension that leaves the story way below. One can think of Butor's *La modification*, or Claude Simon's novels. What makes the difference, and keeps the volume of the tetrahedron open like the top of a grand piano, is the **style**, namely the edge between author and plot. The tessitura of the style stretches from almost nothing up to virtuosity.

From a volume designed by four elements, we have reduced the issue to the relationship between three notions, *story*, *idea* and *style*, which boils down to the dual relation between *author* and *plot*, and ends up in the matter of *style*. But this progressive reduction from four to one was

indispensable to keep in mind the notion of volume, which will soon appear as a key to the notion of world literature, hidden as it may remain behind the notion of style. **Style is what gives volume to storytelling** by lifting from it an idea (or set of ideas) through the resources of language, by involving space and time into a plot. The quality and universal value of any piece of literature strictly depends on the adequacy of the volume thus produced.



Does this mean that there are recipes to produce a perfect part and parcel of the world's literature? Far from it, since the shape and volume of each and every tetrahedron will be stretched, twisted, crunched by each reader's way of exploring it. Moreover, the general conditions under which any reader sails into the book deeply affect the meaning and value of the work: depending on historical background, current references, average social mood, as well as upon personal cultural track record, the nature and effect of the text will considerably differ. Which means that the literary value of the text is only partly enshrined in the work itself: the shape and volume of the tetrahedron may well be sculpted from inside; it also highly depends on external forces bearing on it, which can both crunch it flat or blow it up.

By Nature, This Internal Void Created by the Work Is a Drop of Human Nature's Substance

Interestingly enough, that sad statement entails the understanding that literature is neither the offspring of an author's genius, nor the emblematic value of a given story or the impact of a breakthrough idea. It lies only in the fact that a volume, a spread, a side jump has been displayed by the inter-play of the four apexes required to produce a book. Unless that *volume* is either disrupted by nonsense, or squashed flat by external rebuke or total lack of style, any text, movie, cartoon strip or novel is made of a small volume, however tiny it may be, which qualifies it for belonging to world literature, inasmuch as it is a hollow capturing the very substance of the World, namely *elseness*. The World is by nature *that something else* which prevents us from closing the account of knowledge down to a baseline figure. It is only made of "something else," which by nature can never be counted up to a total amount. The World comes under the infinite, not under totality: therefore its nature is not to be sought on the side of piling up aspects, but in the process of opening up to unexpected dimensions.

How is literature so? By offering the shelter of an open space to people's spirit across the world and throughout all ages. World literature is not a literature that would tally the global nature of the world as a whole, as well as across millennia, a ridiculous purpose indeed. Neither is it the endless attempt to capture all aspects of the world through a range of works, each of which would focus on a distinct view: Jorge Luis Borges fancied a wonderful novel about a young shepherd who was scourged with the gift of remembering every single detail of everything: which dog barked to which cow, where, how and when, which cloud had *such a shape* and which one *another one* at any moment of the day, and so forth. The novel drives us fast into understanding that forgetting most of what we notice, leaving even more unnoticed and stepping over most of what we keep in mind, is a vital condition to prevent us going mad. The world is far too big, too diverse and too swiftly changing for any of us to capture even a slight glance of its supposed overall global reality.

Literature offers the exact contrary to those insane options: it carves, into the maze of a world that will forever remain out of reach, little holes, each in the form of a tetrahedron, in which one can live for a while and survive the whirl of the overall stream one is swimming in, like everybody else, from birth to death. Moving from one of these holes to another gives breath to humankind that can be compared to one who is drowning. Each and every hole is part and parcel of an alternative world, namely one

in which a person's bosom can expand. As such, any piece of literature is a cell from that alternative world, very much like a bubble of foam is a constitutive part of the foam, not a capsule or a node closed in upon itself.

In that respect, literature is The World. Not because it would replace the real world, or insofar as it would mirror it, but because it offers to all of us what is needed by all of us to experience the very fact of belonging to humankind and sharing a world: small volumes carved outside one's self, in which (by reading, watching, thinking, feeling, etc.) one can fill a different framework with one's own sensitiveness. Since filling such volumes, as many times as one may wish, leaves them empty and ready for others, over and over, those volumes are the stable and common ground on which humankind happens to be a global whole, and not only a meaningless collection of vanishing distinct people. The Iliad was not drafted for twenty-first-century Greek readers, nor for Chinese or Scandinavian readers. It tells about foregone stories, interests, stakes. Yet, it offers such a vast cave for people to retreat in that it remains a constitutive part of what was referred to as the foam of humankind.[1]

To that extent, literature is the shelter for what is left of the possibility for the world to be a human one. The process of globalization is continuously mainstreaming our human condition further and deeper, into a sort of plasma channeled in a ring around the earth, moving faster and gaining fluidity: from a cloud of separate items, humankind is shifting swiftly into a sort of liquid whole, each drop of which is equivalent to any other. The digital revolution has already made this image real, insofar as images, sounds, texts and even objects can be turned into a range of digits available anywhere else on earth at any time. This is a foreshadowing of where we will belong in the incoming future in the "real" world: to a flux of commodities, we the humans becoming increasingly another kind of commodity from the overarching point of view of the global software. From that mainstream, the humanity of humankind will spirit itself out faster and faster, leaving the living to the mere conditions of items soon to be dissolved in a global stream.

This is where literature comes into play as the only antidote, as long as it keeps producing bubbles in that global blending of everything into everything, of each and everyone into anyone… Such tiny blisters afford space for staying aloft out of the melting lot, and the long trail of bubbles remaining open inside the globalizator plasma keeps humankind alive as such, namely as a potential for elseness, which is the true nature of a world left human.

Once considered as a volume delineated by the four apexes plot, space, time and author, any form of literature is by itself a small bit of the single global volume which all men and women, put together across the full span of ages, constitute inasmuch as they are themselves splinters of humankind. Any piece of literature is a stand-alone in every respect, except for the fact that, by opening up what we call here a "*volume*," it is also, and primarily, a quantum of the human global whole, the global hole, home to humankind as a species gifted with language—a repository for human nature outside the vortex of globalization, for infinity outside the drive towards totalization, for holiness away from our time's satanic attempt to produce a unified single world of similarities.

Some home, actually! A hovering one, with no location, no features, no pillars nor any limits, a proxy for the digital cloud, although an opposite one. In the Cloud, you find data. It is a place of *conservation*. In the (W)Hole (We All?), you are exposed to *conversation*, namely to drifting away from data. Data are accurate and stable. Any exchange between them can be exactly measured. In the (W)Hole, that all the tiny blisters of literature build into a living foam, the slightest change impacts everything else, changing the fragile and ever-changing architecture of the foam. You can never measure, nor anticipate, nor repair the shifts that occur from the mere fact of writing or reading another text upon the fluttering mesh of literature the (W)Hole is made of. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in 1852 by Harriet Beecher-Stowe, had a tremendous impact on history, as it forged public opinion on both sides of the Atlantic to finally ban slavery. This major change did not pull through thanks to the (indispensable) action of activists and politicians: it took a turn of the tide in the very bosom of people's minds to allow the said political actors to achieve their goal. And that tilting came about within the shared (w)hole of literature.

Changing the Vision

Instead of considering world literature as a grand tetrahedronic construction made of all the possible tetrahedrons (1), it should rather be understood as a structure resulting from the combination of all the hollows brought about by those tetrahedrons (2), which ends up in the structure of a foam or a lather (3), which obviously builds up

(*continued*)

(continued)

into a global (W)Hole (4), in which the slightest blow or change impacting a single edge redesigns the whole feature, as all the bubbles will have to rearrange their respective forms and positions—thus proving that they are not a series of hollows making a global lather, but a global (W)Hole made of millions of internal hollows. This is the picture of the human world, as opposed to the vision of the ongoing mainstream world we are living in, which will more and more take the shape of a range of digits.

To push the idea to its full-fledged bearing, this (W)Hole should not be regarded as a space where all works of literature would be stockpiled. It has to be considered, difficult as it may seem, as a global hole made of holes, the vast flock of all the tiny hollows created by readers as they explore the tetrahedrons proposed by our four elements, displaying as many tents under which to find a shelter. This vision is difficult to figure out, unless one understands that literature is not something in itself, but merely a series of flakes from the same immaterial substance, which is **translation**.

Writing, as well as reading, belongs to the realm of translation, as it calls upon the faculty to retrieve an issue into a blend of *story* and *idea* that will, in turn, be retrieved again into a squirreled-away benefit by the reader. Both should be considered as scales of a single, unique specificity of humans, namely the power to phrase out what comes to his (her) experience, knowledge, memory and so on. That specificity is *translation*, and it confers a common nature to all aspects of literature (writing, translating, reading), which happens to be, by the same token, the root-nature of humankind.

There is a world literature, namely any of the smallest pieces of literature, inasmuch as it offers an open hollow to humankind's core nature: translation. There is therefore no need to invent a specific shelf for "World Literature" as opposed to… What? Local literature, national literature, ethnic literature? Any piece of literature fits into the big figure of world literature, not because it would be a building block for it (then, according to plan, until which final stage?), but inasmuch as it adds one more immaterial blister to the immaterial (w)hole of perpetual on-going translation amongst human beings. And, to that extent, it is more than likely that the

tiny open space nested in the hollow of the work will inflate all the more if the work is genuinely rooted in a specific culture, a deep-rooted tradition, a personal style. Tolstoi belongs to world literature because he was so adamant about capturing the specificity of Russia's gist in his own time, and the same can be said of all major writers. World literature is enshrined in any deep-rooted literature, where space is best given to the elseness (for others) of a specificity, therefore offering a larger sucking power to enhance yearning for what are, in ourselves, the footprints of the world we belong to: humankind on earth.

The only authors who would probably never qualify for getting on board with world literature are those who would try up front to write world literature directly. But then they would also fail to be authors, as writing on clouds seldom prints out.

Reference

1. This concept is borrowed from Peter Sloterdijk's work, *Spheren III, Schäume*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2003, a major breakthrough in the understanding of the present human condition.



CHAPTER 10

World Literature in Graphic Novels and Graphic Novels as World Literature

Monika Schmitz-Emans

On Graphic Story-Telling

The history of the graphic novel as a narrative that may be regarded as a new genre of the novel only begins in the second half of the twentieth century. There is, however, a pre-history, both of visual story-telling in general and of the specific style which is characteristic of most graphic novels: the style of the comic.

There is no absolute consent between comic historians regarding the date and circumstances under which the comic was "born," but from the very moment when the first newspaper comics were created in the years around 1900, a new adaptation genre emerged, inviting the artists to quote, to parody and to modify texts and images of different kinds and functions—works of literature and the fine arts as well as visual and textual forms belonging to everyday culture. Even the early creators of newspaper cartoons eventually borrowed figure types, plots and structural elements from other cultural contexts: from the graphic arts, and here especially from the art of caricature, but also from a broader tradition of graphic

M. Schmitz-Emans (✉)
Department of Comparative Literature, Ruhr University Bochum, Bochum, Germany
e-mail: monika.schmitz-emans@rub.de

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_10

story-telling, and from literature—which offered a large stock of models for narrative plots as well as characters that could be transferred into newspaper cartoons. Thus one might compare, for instance, Winsor McCay's "Little Nemo" episodes which were published for many years, starting in 1905, with the frame story of Lewis Carroll's famous novel *Alice in Wonderland* (1865): a dream journey leads its protagonist to a strange counter world that nevertheless resembles the everyday world, and finally it comes to a sudden end.

In the first decades of the history of comics, the new art of graphic story-telling was restricted to small formats, mostly to newspaper strip cartoons. In the 1920s and 1930s, cartoonists gradually explored larger formats that were published as independent books, and this new format, of course, offered new possibilities of a more extended and sometimes also more complex way of graphic story-telling.[1] New kinds of stories were invented—but the comic book proved also to be a medium for re-telling plots of works of world literature.

Since the 1940s, especially canonized works of world literature are often (and sometimes in quite inventive ways) adapted to the specific representation media and structures of graphic story-telling. Novels, short stories, poems and dramatic plays are transformed into graphic narratives—sometimes in an obvious and transparent way that makes the reader recognize the hypotext immediately; sometimes, however, in a radically metamorphic style that puzzles readers and challenges their imagination as well as their wit. At any rate, such transformation is always linked not only with interpretation, but also with reflections about the comic artist's specific artistic means—be it explicitly or implicitly.

The art of the comic as such has been interpreted as an art of repetition—or, as one might also say, as an art of quotation. According to the comic theorist Ole Frahm,[2] reading comics means to re-identify characters and situations, although in the course of the graphic narrative they are submitted to continuous change. Within the sequence of panels that constitute a comic narrative, the characters regularly appear in a way as their own doubles, each time a little different from before but in a way that allows their "identification" as "the character X." The reader has to interpret the different drawings as re-appearances of "the same" characters in order to see them acting in a "story." Analogously, the situations as they are depicted in the single panels differ from each other, but the reader is supposed to interpret them as logically and chronologically linked together,

as "before and after"—because otherwise the panel sequence would not appear as a narrative, but merely as a sequence of single pictures.

But this is not the only structural reason why comic narratives are based on the principle of repetition. As the first comics were serial strip cartoons that were regularly published in newspapers, each strip necessarily referred to former episodes of its series by quoting the characters and settings already known from the previous episodes. Readers like to meet their favorite characters regularly and to read the new episodes within the context formed by their antecedents. Self-quotation thus can be regarded as the ruling principle of the strip cartoon—with regard to the structure of the individual story as well as the structure of strip sequences.

Among the early comic producers, there were artists with a strong inclination to self-reflexivity. It was they who highlighted the basic principles of their own art by arranging stories that made these principles clearly evident—especially the principle of repetition, quotation and "creating doubles."

George Herriman's famous "Krazy Kat" series (1913–1944) presented a set of protagonists (Krazy Kat, Offisa Pupp, Ignatz Mouse) that were characterized by their inclination to repeat themselves.[3] There was a simple nucleus that was repeated again and again in every episode (Krazy loves Ignatz, Ignatz detests Krazy and throws a brick at him, Pupp arrests Ignatz and puts him in jail) and, inevitably, all the episodes resembled each other. In an ostentatious and self-referential way, Herriman's stories were stories about repetition, not only on the level of content but also with regard to the structural principles of comic art. Repetition for its own sake and self-reflection are most closely linked together, and Herriman's level of self-reflexivity set the yardsticks for his followers.

Another early comic artist who equally relied on the effects of repetition was Winsor McCay in his before-mentioned "Little Nemo" series (1905–1914, 1924–1926). All adventures of his hero resemble each other as excursions into highly fantastical dreamscapes, and especially the endings of the episodes are all alike: Nemo wakes up, and everything turns out to have been a dream, shaped by certain circumstances of Nemo's sleeping situation. McCay again and again stresses the remote but evident resemblance between dream worlds and the everyday world, thus creating situations in which fantastic realities "quote" the ordinary world, transforming them strongly but leaving them identifiable to the reader.

Both Herriman's and McCay's art can be compared to literary models that influenced both their basic plots and their settings, and which moreover must have sharpened the visual artists' sense for repetition as an artistic principle. McCay's Little Nemo adventures structurally as well as on the level of content are reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's episodically structured "Alice" books, which send their heroine though a series of dreamlike adventures mirroring everyday situations. Herriman's basic plot (concerning especially Krazy, his lacking sense of "reality" and his role as a victim of violence) quotes the Don Quixote model—and thus a novel that is already shaped by a highly self-reflexive interest in "repetition." Not surprisingly, there is a character called Don Koyote among the inhabitants of the desert-like world of Krazy Kat. By designing this character as a homage to Cervantes, Herriman gives at the same time expression to his awareness of his own literary heritage.

It may be useful to keep this affinity of comics with quotation and repetition in mind while reading comics and graphic novels as adaptations in a narrower sense. As a consequence of the theoretical approach opened by the concept of comics as an "art of quotation," comics that reflect on "repetition" can be regarded as self-reflexive. In a way, comics and graphic novels that are substantially based on literary texts—comic *adaptations* of literary texts in a literal sense—do not only "quote" from their literary sources, but do so in a very obvious way. They present themselves as re-tellings of stories that have already been told, as a new strategy of staging characters that were already created when the adapted texts were written; they expose their own basic principle as being constitutive for comics on different levels: the principle of repetition. So, at least virtually, every "adapting" comic is self-reflexive.

According to my hypothesis, self-reflexive graphic artists often adapt literary hypotexts in order to explore and demonstrate basic aspects of representation in their own medium. The examples presented here may illustrate the broad spectrum of strategies applied in this context.

World Literature in Comics and Graphic Novels: Adaptations

The Concept of "Classics Illustrated" and Its Modifications

Starting in 1941 with "The Three Musketeers" and continuing for several decades, the publishing house Gilberton Company produced graphic nar-

ratives based on the plots of literary works. As already indicated by the serial title, the famous "Classic Comics," since 1947 published as "Classics Illustrated" (CI) were dedicated to the adaptation of literary "classics"—that is, of "world literature" in the emphatic sense of this term. Albert Kanter, a Russian immigrant to the USA, developed the concept of a comic series on the basis of the literary canon. There was an expectable misbalance in favor of English literature, but "classics" from other national literatures were also broadly represented; 160 titles were released, and many of them have been translated into other languages. Like the superhero comic, the Western and the science fiction (SF) comic, this series stimulated a broad reception of comics as an autonomous publishing format. According to paratextual notes, its intention was to introduce especially young readers to the world of great literature, and so even the term "comic" was used reluctantly. As it said, "The name 'Classics Illustrated' is the better name for your favorite periodical. It really isn't a comic […] it's the illustrated, or picture, version of your favorite classics"; and the paratexts underlined the idea that the volumes were not meant to be read as substitutes for the originals, but as instructive vehicles preparing for future reading. Kanter obviously believed in his educational program, and in order to stress CI's "seriousness," no advertising was inserted. Actually, many readers used "CI" in order to get informed about "high culture," although many teachers and other critics remained doubtful with regard to the informational as well as to the pedagogic value of such a "reading help," mainly due to general resentment against comics. Although Gilberton Company employed famous comic artists such as Louis Zansky and Jack Kirby, usually CI illustrators were not ambitious to explore individual drawing styles. So CI's mostly rather conventional graphic language, shaped by a "realistic" style, prevented the format from undergoing a more autonomous development, as was later on achieved by other adaptations of literary works. Nevertheless, the adaptations were shaped by interpretation and modification on several levels, starting with the production of abridged texts. After the era of Gilberton, other publishers adapted the CI concept; thus in 1976 when the "Marvel Classic Comics" series was started, initially with new editions of already released volumes, later on with new adaptations of canonized texts—36 issues were produced, some of them moderately experimenting with new drawing styles, yet altogether quite uniform.

In 1982, 1983 and 1984, the publisher Oval Projects produced three Shakespeare Comics in the CI format (*Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear*), including the unabridged texts. In 1990, Berkley/First Publishing started a new CI series; 29 issues were published. Their style was different from the old, rather homogenous CI style, probably due to the emergence of the graphic novel genre in the 1980s. Famous artists such as Bill Sienkiewicz and Peter Kuper were engaged in the production, and they created—although still decidedly "adapting" world literature—autonomous works of art. Now, the graphic artists' personal styles were regarded as contributing to the aesthetic qualities of the graphic novels. Just for reasons of comparison one might refer to the "old-fashioned" *Alice in Wonderland* adaptation by Alex A. Blum (1948) as an example of conventional comic style—and to the graphically more original and ambitious adaptation of *Through the Looking Glass* by Kyle Baker (1990/2008).

The Graphic Novel and the History of Comic Adaptations of Literature

In more than one respect, the conception of the "graphic novel" as a larger and autonomous form of graphic story-telling was of formative influence on comic adaptations of literature. (It was comic pioneer Will Eisner who popularized the term "graphic novel" as well as the genre itself, though the expression had been used before and the graphic novel as such is not Eisner's invention.) Graphic novels offered the chance to re-tell already existing stories in complex and often rather refined ways; they opened up a broad field of exploring structures and styles. In a way, the term "graphic novel" is indicative of the fact that comics were and still are mainly regarded as a narrative genre and invites comparison between the "old" and the "new" novel, suggesting that they are sisters and rivals at the same time.

Some of the most inventive graphic novelists have dedicated themselves intensely to the adaptation of literary classics. Stéphane Heuet, originally not a comic artist at all, became famous for his Proust adaptation as his only graphic novel project. Italian comic artist Dino Battaglia adapted many classics in his long career, showing an inclination towards certain kinds of texts: gothic novels, black romantic narratives and other kinds of fantastic literature, including fairy-tales.

There are numerous examples of ambitious graphic novels adapting literary texts. In addition to those examples already mentioned, one might

refer to a recent adaptation of Stevenson's novel about *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Andrzej Klimowski and Danusia Scheijbal (cover design by Dominik Klimowski and Jeff Willis, London 2009). Here, as in many other adaptations, the original text was radically transformed into brief dialogue scenes written by Andrzej Klimowski. Stéphane Heuet offers his readers an abridged Proust text, and he prefers to use literal quotations from the original in order to keep as close to the novel as possible. Klimowski, however, produced an at least partially new text, using Stevenson's sentences but writing new dialogues and narrative passages. To shorten and transform a text means to "interpret" it, but the major "interpreting" part here is on the graphic artist's side: he has to visualize the story, including even the character of Mr. Hyde, who in Stevenson's novel is described as hardly identifiable. The artists choose an expressive black (or dark brown) and white drawing style, often stressing the expressivity of faces. The cover illustration presents a blurred picture of Hyde, unclear in its shapes and thus suggesting a process of metamorphosis.

Multiple Adaptation Strategies

Adaptations of literary hypotexts are of very different extents: there are sequences of very few panels as well as large graphic novels, even novels consisting of several volumes. Stéphane Heuet's *bande dessinée* adaptation of Marcel Proust's voluminous novel *A la recherche du temps perdu* is a work in progress that since 1998 has grown continuously; at the moment, no end is to be expected (Vols. 1–6: 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2013).[4] If Heuet really succeeds in completing his project, it will probably be the longest comic adaptation of literature that ever existed. By several means he stresses the coherence of the different volumes of his graphic novel, which reflects the coherence of Proust's seven-volume novel. While the front covers of the different volumes vary in accordance with the volumes' contents, the back covers constantly show the same image: Proust, writing his novel.

As a counterpart of this ambitious project—ambitious already on the level of extent—there are one-page comics based on literary texts. In a way, they are still "adaptations," although it is mainly left to the reader to reconstruct the links between the panels and their textual references. The single-page "lesson" about Proust's *Recherche* included in a collection of comic adaptations of French literature by David Vandermeulen[5] just shows a portrait of the author Proust who seems to "remember" something, an

image of the seven volumes of his novel, an image of the probably best-known episode from the novel centered around a cup of tea and a cake called Madeleine that stimulate the narrator's childhood memories—and a final panel without image that by its text suggests that now all memories are fading away. (The panel sequence is attributed to "Mademoiselle Adeline Weeckmans.") As we see, comic artists can reduce a huge novel to one single page—as the condensed comic version of Proust's *Recherche* illustrates (Vandermeulen: Littérature pour tous: Proust, "Leçon 7").

Altogether, comic adaptations of literature present themselves as a genre with many faces—not only with regard to extent and respective drawing styles. Specifically, there is a broad scale between strategies of canonization of masterpieces on the one hand and canon parody and deconstruction on the other.

Parodies

There is no clear borderline between adaptations that just re-tell a story from literature in order to inform readers about or remind them of the plot, and parodist works connecting such retellings with humoristic or satirical tendencies. In a more general sense, all adaptations of literary works by graphic artists might be characterized as "parodies." But there are examples that appear specifically "mocking" and thus appeal to the reader's sense of humor—be it in order to provoke or be it in order to ridicule not only a canonized "classic," but also, by extension, notions of "high culture" as such. Many graphic artists play with the elements of a canonized classic by creating "modernized" versions of the old plots.

Several years ago, Posy Simmonds published *Gemma Bovary* (1999), a parodist re-telling of elements from Flaubert's novel *Emma Bovary*. Simmonds' story is situated in the present; her female protagonist as well as some other characters mirror Flaubert's characters or rather their roles, and they experience similar situations. The parodist quality of this adaptation is mainly based on two ideas. First, there are not only parallels but also significant differences in the fates of Simmonds' protagonists, compared with Flaubert's novel; thus Gemma Bovary does not commit suicide, but falls victim to a terribly trivial accident. Second, the characters in the graphic novel are aware of their similarity to Flaubert's characters. There is a passionate Flaubert reader among them who observes the other char-

acters, reminds them of the intriguing parallels, tries to warn Gemma Bovary to avoid Emma's fate—and unwillingly contributes to Gemma's death when he gets involved in her life story.

Compilations and Anthologies of "Classics" in Comic-Style Adaptations

Comics and graphic novels that adapt literary texts are closely linked canonization processes. The "Classics Illustrated" series is explicitly dedicated to literary "classics," and the "Introducing"/"For Beginners" series presents partial adaptations in the context of portraying canonized authors. But independent comics and graphic novels also prefer canonized works as material or foundation. In a way, comic adaptations prove the status of a text as a canonized work, and at the same time confirm this status.

There is a comic book format that mainly plays with the concept of a literary canon: collections of very short comics, often only filling one single page, that refer to a selection of canonized "classics" and, of course, are compressing and condensing them extremely. Often, these pocket-sized comic classics are almost wordless, except for their titles that quote the titles of literary works; at any rate, there is not much space for textual elements, and the panels are necessarily laconic. Already due to the small format, the pocket comic classics (as one might call them) appear as parodies; their humoristic or satirical energy, however, does not mainly aim at the respective text itself, but at the process of canonization as a consolidation of "high cultural" values, in the belief in canonized knowledge and in the superficiality of its uses.

In order to understand the pocket-size "classic," the reader should already know the texts referred to—or at least connect some ideas with them. However, the anthologies present themselves as useful means of "instruction" that—as an additional advantage—can be consulted quickly and without spending too much time on the acquisition of socially valued knowledge. Regarded as the successors of "Classics Illustrated," these anthologies of "world literature classics" appear as self-referential graphic narratives. They do not only parody literary texts and their characters, but also the idea of functionalizing comics as media of information and "education."

Collections of Comic Adaptations in Anthological Books (Examples)

- Moga Mobos 100 Meisterwerke der Weltliteratur. Berlin 2001.
- Alice im Comicland. Comiczeichner präsentieren Werke der Weltliteratur. Ed. Irene Mahrer-Stich. Zürich 1993.
- Literatur gezeichnet. Ed. Wolfgang Alber und Heinz Wolf. Furth an der Triesting 2003 (Vol. 1)/2008 (Vol. 2).
- [David Vandermeulen, Ed.] Littérature pour tous, Synthèse, Vulgarisation et Adaptation en Bande Dessinée des Grands Romans Français à l'Usage de l'Adolescent Contemporain, sous la direction de Monsieur Vandermeulen, seconde édition Montpellier, 6 Pieds Sous Terre, 2002, 2004.
- Henrik Lange, Weltliteratur für Eilige. Und am Ende sind sie alle tot. München 2009. Orig. Sweden 2008, Engl. 2008.
- Russ Kick (Ed.). The Graphic Canon. The World's Great Literature as Comics and Visuals. Volume 1: From the Epic of Gilgamesh to Shakespeare to Dangerous Liaisons (2012); Volume 2: From "Kubla Khan" to the Brontë Sisters to The Picture of Dorian Gray (2012); Volume 3: From Heart of Darkness to Hemingway to Infinite Jest (2013).

Examples: Adaptations of Works of E. T. A. Hoffmann and Franz Kafka

In order to give at least a sketchy impression of the varieties of adaptation styles, I will present three brief series of examples consisting of adaptations of texts from E. T. A. Hoffmann and Kafka.

Adaptations of Works of E. T. A. Hoffmann
The very brief and condensed "Moga Mobo" (Berlin 2001) version of Hoffmann's voluminous novel *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, created by an artist calling himself Leowald, presents itself as compressed to one page. The reader must know the novel to understand the drawings and their specific points, otherwise the images will tell him no story. Hoffmann's novel is not humoristic; this graphic adaptation, however, transforms the basic plot into a rather grotesque and humorous scene. Adaptation here presents itself as an art of rigid transformation. Although the characters are trans-

formed from serious and tragic figures to fuzzy comic characters, there is, however, one important structural element which is "adapted" from the novel and thus respected as important: there is a level difference between a framing story and the story within this story. Leowald's panel is not composed like a conventional panel, but resembles a stack of paper sheets, overshadowed by the contours of a window and a tree, as if they were placed on a writing desk. And there may even be stains from a glass or a cup on the paper... Thus, the drawing scene presents itself as equivalent to the writing scene in Hoffmann's novel. Adapting a piece of literature, Leowald creates an autoreferential comic (and the window structure of the shadow depicted is even reminiscent of a conventional panel structure as used in most of the other Moga Mobo comics).

A recently published adaptation of Hoffmann's detective story "Das Fräulein von Scudery" by Alexandra Kardinar and Volker Schlecht follows entirely different principles.[6] Hoffmann's text (which is, although shorter than *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, quite a long narrative) is re-told rather meticulously and in detail, using dialogues and other text elements from the original text. In addition to the story as such, there are elements of information about the nineteenth-century story's cultural and historical background. By way of the panel structures as well as the combination of different kinds of textual elements, the graphic novel presents itself as an artificial arrangement based on the story—which is not simply "told," but rather "staged" and represented as a sequence of images from a performance. Kardinar and Schlecht's adaptation of a literary work of art is autoreferential, too—and this in many respects, starting with the author's (Hoffmann's) name represented by letters and speech bubbles and the graphic novel's title written by the drawing of a long "paper strip." The characters are depicted in an intentionally repetitive manner, in order to stress their quality as comic characters; and there are "explaining" passages in which the artists employ different kinds of logos, thus stressing (by these and a number of other means) the difference between drawing styles as such.

The Italian comic artist Dino Battaglia, who created adaptations of Hoffmann's narratives "Der Sandmann" and "Das öde Haus," shortens and even changes the original stories.[7] He strongly dramatizes the narrated events—and "stages" the events in a way that allows him to profit from his own expressive means as a drawing artist; something that becomes evident, for instance, by the use of strong black-and-white contrasts and heavy shadows. By interpreting Hoffmann's narratives as texts reflecting on viewing processes, Battaglia creates self-referential image sequences, too.

Adaptations of Works of Franz Kafka
Complementarily, I will give just a brief view on several stylistically different adaptations of Kafka's texts. The Moga Mobo adaptation of Kafka's novel *Der Prozess* again presents a very short and condensed version of the novel's story—not only once again appealing to the reader's memory (which must reconstruct what the panels do *not* show), but also demonstrating in an ostensive way that graphic story-telling as such is an art of condensation.[8]

The book series "Introducing [XY]" (XY standing for quite different names here) dedicates its issues to important scientists and theories, to philosophers and philosophies, to artists and to literary authors. Robert Crumb, together with the scenarist David Zane Mairowitz, contributed to the series via a Kafka portrait. The graphic novel is dedicated to Kafka's life and works, and the comic adaptations of the writer's works are integrated into the framing biographical narrative. Altogether, Mairowitz and Crumb interpret the adapted works by creating mirror effects between the author Kafka and his characters.[9]

Daniel Casanave and Robert Cara adapted Kafka's first novel *Amerika* (*Der Verschollene*) in a large format, a graphic novel of three volumes.[10] Although the adaptation is close to the novel with regard to the plot, the original text of course had to be rigidly shortened. Casanave's slapstick style adaptation—his images resemble early silent movie images—is convergent with explicit interpretations of Kafka's novel, which was compared by several critics to early film stories and their visual arrangement.

David Zane Mairowitz, a scenarist already engaged in "Introducing Kafka," also contributed to an adaptation of Kafka's novel *Der Proceß* from 2008 by Chantal Montellier.[11] In the subtitle, the book calls itself "A Graphic Novel," thus indicating the claim to transform a novel into a work of another art. But "The Trial" does not quote only Kafka, but also another graphic adaptation of Kafka: the before-mentioned adaptation by Robert Crumb. So, Montellier creates a double adaptation—and she exemplarily demonstrates the transformation strategies of her art practice.

Graphic Novels as World Literature

At present, works of graphic story-telling are regarded as an established form of visual literature and, according to a broad consensus, graphic novels represent a relatively recent, but important genre of the novel. Probably the most evident proof of their status as examples of literature as an art form is given by overviews describing a canon of graphic novels.

Thus Gene Kannenberg's guide book *500 Essential Graphic Novels: The Ultimate Guide* (New York, 2008) lists for instance a selection of successful and artistically ambitious works of graphic literature in order to establish or affirm canonization. Although US, French (including Belgian) and Japanese graphic literature is dominant in terms of quantity, graphic literature has to be regarded as "world literature" for more than one reason. So we note, of course, that artists of many other countries and languages have contributed and still contribute to the success story of graphic story-telling. Secondly, visual narratives, especially graphic novels, are often translated into another language. And indirectly, this sometimes fosters the reception of graphic narratives in foreign languages, as the artists become famous and fan communities emerge. Probably the most successful graphic novel, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980–1991), may be regarded as an example of such a global reception, not least based on translations, but also in its English original.

There are several sub-genres of the graphic novel which may be compared and even parallelized to the sub-genres of the conventional novel: historical novels, biographical and autobiographical novels, travelogues, fantasy novels, utopian and dystopian novels, novels based on mythological plots, detective novels and so on. According to my hypothesis, with regard to this broad field of graphic narrative genres, the interest that graphic novelists took and still take in the works of world literature has been of formative influence: it efficiently fostered the development and the history of success of graphic story-telling as a new kind of novel literature. Therefore, I want to put a special accent on several forms and strategies of "expanding" adaptations, which may illustrate how examples of graphic narrative as an autonomous art form were created by taking works of world literature (in a conventional sense of literature) as a starting point.

Pastiches

The liberties comic artists take are not restricted to transformation experiments with regard to characters and plots from specific single originals, but also include the quotation and combination of elements from different sources. Sometimes a story is constructed by citing characters from more than a single text, even from different authors—as is the case in the graphic novel series about "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen," created by Alan Moore and O'Neill and published in 1999 and later on in several subsequent volumes. Here, in a narrative about rather fantastic adventures that refer to the plots of several works of literary fiction, pro-

tagonists belonging to these works of fiction meet and interact, among them Stoker's Mina Harker, Stevenson's double characters Jekyll and Hyde, Verne's Captain Nemo, Wells' Doctor Moreau and his equally famous Invisible Man. Transferred into another story, these characters only partially "behave" as they used to in their original context—but their respective profile is shaped by these contexts as well, and the reader who interprets the elements and episodes of this graphic novel has to take the quoted novels into account.

In a more stylistically different way, French graphic novelist Marc-Antoine Mathieu constructs stories, invents protagonists and structures the comic book's space by alluding to literary authors and their works. The name of the protagonist of an entire graphic novel series, "Julius Corentin Acquefacques, prisonnier des rêves," Acquefacques, is pronounced AKFAK, and is thus a hidden palindrome of Kafka.[12] Not surprisingly, the hero's adventures repeatedly remind one of Kafka's novels, but also of Jorge Luis Borges and his visionary representations of temporal and spatial orders that differ from conventional concepts.

Spin-offs

Popular literary texts and films are often continued in spin-offs. Their characters appear in new stories that profess either to tell the continuation of a story already told, or to present a preceding episode or even an alternative plot—the story of what might have happened to the characters under different circumstances, in another time and so on. Comic artists and graphic novelists also adopt literary characters in order to tell those episodes or versions of their stories that are not part of the original text from which they stem. "Continuations" of famous plots are rather popular in literature adaptations, and sometimes "alternative" stories are told here, as well.

Just in order to give an example, several spin-offs to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* may be mentioned. One of them is—on the basis of popular legends—dedicated to the story of Dracula's ancestor Vlad Tepes (a); another one transposes the basic elements of Jonathan Harker's visit to Dracula's castle into present times (b); a third one suggests on the occasion of a portrait of Bram Stoker that elements of Dracula's story were founded in autobiographical experiences (c); and there are others that take up the challenge of the plot by creating first and foremost fantastical images (d).

Comics Based on the Characters and Plot of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: Overview

(a) Hermann & Yves H. Auf Draculas Spuren. Vlad der Pfähler. (Strip Art Feature 2006.) German edition: Kult editionen. Wuppertal 2006.
(b) Dany & Yves H. Auf Draculas Spuren. Transsylvanien. (Castermann 2006.) German edition: Kult editionen. Wuppertal 2007.
(c) Séra & Yves H. Auf Draculas Spuren: Bram Stoker (Sur les traces de Dracula. Castermann 2006.) German edition: Kult editionen. Wuppertal 2007.
(d) Hippolyte. Dracula, Tome I. D'après l'oeuvre de Bram Stoker. Grenoble, édition Glénat, 2003.

Portraits of Literary Authors and Author-Related Fictions

Comics and graphic novels are not only created in order to re-tell literary plots and to "cite" literary characters. References to literature are also constitutive for graphic narratives dedicated to literary authors. The single volumes of the popular series "XY for Beginners," paralleled by the series "Introducing XY," are dedicated to important scientists, philosophers and authors, and among the literary writers portrayed in them there are representatives of earlier as well as of twentieth-century literature. The volumes usually combine biographical information with remarks concerning the main works of their protagonists. Sometimes they suggest a close connection between biography and fiction, and sometimes they even include short adaptations of major works or quotations from them. (The drawings are sometimes based on photos or other historical documents related to the biography presented, and so on the level of images as well as of texts the graphic narrative is characterized by quotations.) Framing adaptations of literary texts by the life story of their authors suggests an autobiographical approach to the works cited. However, this linking of biographical realities with fictions can be meant as a parody. Altogether, in spite of parodist and other playful elements, the "Introducing" and "For Beginners" series are conceived as books that can be consulted in order to gain "real" and useful information.

Graphic novels telling stories about poets and writers are not necessarily conceived of as informative. Some of them transform their protagonists

into characters in invented stories—stories which present themselves as not completely independent of their biography, but are far away from "documentary" representation in even the broadest sense. In this fashion, Noël Tuot and Daniel Casanave in "Baudelaire" (2008) send their hero Charles Baudelaire on a dreamlike trip to extreme regions, suggestively alluding to Baudelaire's œuvre, but also to Arthur Rimbaud's "A Season in Hell", thus evoking motives from both Baudelaire's and Rimbaud's poems. Tuot and Casanave's Baudelaire not only explores paradise and hell, but he also meets Jean-PaulSartre and tries to attend Victor Hugo's funeral.

Neil Gaiman in the context of his "Sandman" comics tells the story of William Shakespeare, who as the director of a shabby company of strolling actors is engaged by the characters of his play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to perform it (Dream Country, Sandman series, 1991). Titania and Oberon themselves watch the performance, in which—programmatically—"real characters" from Shakespeare's company interact with characters from the fantastic fairy world, or rather support them for the sake of the performance.

The auto-referential dimension of both types of fictions about literary authors is based on the idea of transgressing the borderline between biographical realities and imaginary worlds. The graphic novel not only insists on its own capacity to arrange such transgressions as a follower of dramatic or narrative fiction; it also visualizes the usually invisible and so, in a way, goes even further than the literary texts.

Reflections About Style

Raymond Queneau's book *Exercices de style* (1947; Exercises in style) contains a highly self-reflexive text that focuses on the dimension of style as constitutive of narratives. One and the same simple everyday story—or even less than a story—is told 99 times: a man gets on a Parisian bus and takes a ride, observing other passengers. Queneau employs 99 different rhetorical styles to shape this minimal plot, thus demonstrating the power of transformation connected with the shifting of narrative styles. In his graphic novel *99 Ways to Tell a Story* (2005), comic artist Matt Madden has taken up the challenge. He invents an analogously simple plot: a man, obviously a graphic artist, leaves his working desk heading for the refrigerator, which turns out to be empty; then he asks a woman in another room for the time. Madden uses 99 different styles of graphic narrative to

tell this story, not only presenting it from very different perspectives and according to different structuring patterns, but also using drawing styles that can be identified (and are actually identified) as the personal styles of famous graphic artists. So, Madden's comic book is on the one hand a homage to Raymond Queneau, who provides the artist Madden with the idea of re-telling a simple plot in numerous style variations, but it is also an exercise in adapting drawing styles. On both levels, adaptation appears as the central principle of creativity.

Self-Reflection by Ostentatious Adaptation: Tezuka Osamu Staging World Literature

The examples presented are just a very small selection from a broad and multi-faceted field of adaptation experiments. What they have in common, in spite of their varying length, style, intention and context, is a self-referential dimension—due to their basic quality as intentional and ostentatious echoes of former works, plots and styles. Comic adaptations of literary texts present themselves as "something that can be identified" as something already known, but in "another form"—as "the same" and at the same time something "different" from the original—as "doubles" and "revenants" shaped by their deep ambiguity. They confirm the significance of heritages, and at the same time use the inherited values as toys; they pay respect to the literary classics, and at the same time submit them to trivialization, parody and deconstruction; they insist on the importance of cultural memory, and at the same time blur and confuse the reader's memories of what he or she claims to know. They adapt the role of dedicated advocates and servants of literary tradition, as well as the attitude of disrespectful and even blasphemous rebels against this tradition.

As one of the most self-conscious graphic artists adapting world literature classics, Tezuka Osamu created himself an alter ego within his "Nanairo Inko" series,[13] in the character of an actor without a commonly known face, playing all kinds of roles, performing all kinds of plays from different times and cultures—respectful and at the same time disrespectful towards the great works of dramatic world literature. "Nanairo Inko" as a manga series is dedicated to the art of adapting literary classics by performing them and thus by interpreting as well as transforming them in various manners and on many different occasions. In its quality as a sequence of stories based on literary plots, sometimes even deliberately arranged in accordance with literary plots, the series reflects itself and the

art of graphic story-telling in general in the art of performing literature. Both arts reveal themselves as arts of creative repetition, of echoing, of adaptation. Therefore "Nanairo Inko" may be characterized as a meta-adaptation manga.

Comics based on literary texts present themselves as doubles and shape-shifters, like the rainbow parakeet in Osamu's manga episodes. By quoting from the literary canon, they confirm that canons have to be interpreted creatively in order to let them survive historical change. Tezuka's adaptations of world literature in the "Nanairo Inko" series at the same time perform and reflect processes of adaptation—even explicitly, mainly by referring to the theatre as another art of adaptation.

Final Remarks on Adaptations of World Literature and Adaptations as World Literature

What are the probable reasons and motifs of adapting literary texts to graphic story-telling? Why does this practice play such an eminent role in the world of comics, mangas and graphic novels?

At first, of course, the interest in good stories, plots and characters should be regarded as an important issue. We may interpret the history of literature itself as a complex process of re-telling old stories again and again, quoting them, adapting them, transforming them. (And therefore, the issue of intertextuality as well as of adaptation has been and still is discussed intensely among literary scholars.) By adapting literary plots and characters and by re-telling stories that were told before in literary text, graphic story-telling nourishes itself from abundant resources—taking advantage not only of an inexhaustible number of impressive stories and characters (Hamlet, Don Quixote, Alice etc.), but also of the themes and subjects that were represented and reflected in the literary tradition by telling those stories.

Secondly, the adaptation of stories, subjects and characters that are already known to readers as composition elements of literary sources often facilitates the combination of different representation levels—namely, combinations of story-telling and commentary, respectively of story-telling and information (in the sense of transmission of knowledge). As the example of "Das Fräulein von Scudery" or Mairowitz and Crumb's introduction to "Kafka" illustrate exemplarily, many comic adaptations of literary texts hybridize entertainment and information, or, as one might also

say, aesthetic and didactic representation. The “Classics Illustrated” format itself has been adapted and transformed by many followers, often in a quite ludistic way, often also in order to play with (and at the same time often question) the borderline between art and the mediation of knowledge. Especially the scientific paradigm that was labeled “poetics of knowledge” stimulates ways of graphic as well as verbal story-telling, which illustrate the creative and constructive (or the aesthetic) dimension of modeling knowledge on the one hand, and the fact that art and literature themselves are based on knowledge discourses on the other hand.

Thirdly, adaptations of world literature classics by graphic story-tellers contribute efficiently to the process of leveling out the differences (or rather, the distinctions) between high culture and popular culture. They cross borders and close gaps (to quote Leslie Fiedler, who popularized this eminently successful project of the last decades). By adapting canonized works of world literature to comics, mangas and graphic novels, a popular art form “conquers” domains of high culture and articulates its own claims on this territory. The motifs for such “intrusions” into the high culture area are different. On the one hand, many graphic novels reclaim for themselves acknowledgment as refined and complex artworks that can successfully compete with the works of more traditional genres. On the other hand, the concept of a canon of high art and literature is often enough also parodied and deconstructed (and, together with the canon, also the ideologies on which canons are based). When high culture is subjected to parody, techniques of graphic story-telling prove to be eminently efficient, mainly because they are historically and systematically linked with and shaped by image forms which transmit criticism in a humoristic and satirical way: by caricature, by the grotesque—by humoristic defamiliarization on the level of form as well as of content.

References

1. *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels. Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*, ed. by Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon, Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2013.
2. Ole Frahm, *Die Sprache des Comics*, Hamburg: Philo Fine Arts, 2010.
3. Patrick McDonell, Karen O’Connell and Georgia Riley de Havenon, *Krazy Kat: The Comic Art of George Herriman*, New York: Harry N Abrams, 1986.

4. Stéphane Heuet, *Marcel Proust/A la recherche du temps perdu*, Combray: French and European Publications Inc., 1998. – *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* – première partie, Paris: Delcourt, 2000. – *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* – seconde partie, Paris: Delcourt, 2002. – *Un amour de Swann* – première partie, Paris: Delcourt, 2006. – *Un amour de Swann* – seconde partie, Paris: Delcourt, 2008. – *Noms de pays: Le nom*, Paris: Delcourt, 2013.
5. David Vandermeulen, *Littérature pour tous*, Montpellier: Six Pieds Sous Terre, 2002, 2004.
6. E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Das Fräulein von Scuderi*, Eine Graphic Novel von Alexandra Kardinar und Volker Schlecht, Frankfurt: Edition Büchergilde, 2011.
7. E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Der Sandmann*, Das öde Haus, gezeichnet von Dino Battaglia, in: Altamira Literaturcomic (1990), Lanham: AltaMira. Cf. also Michel Jans, Mariadelaide Cuozzo, Pierre-Yves Lador, Pierre Péju, Hugo Pratt, Sergio Toppi, Battaglia. *Une Monographie*, St. Egrève: Mosquito, 2006.
8. Comic artist: L. Wawszczyk, *Moga Mobo 103.*
9. *Introducing Kafka*, A Kafka comic by David Zane Mairowitz (text) and Robert Crumb (drawings), Cambridge: Totem Books, 1993.
10. Franz Kafka, *L'Amérique*, Frontignan/France: Six Pieds Sous Terre; *Vol. 1: Une villa aux environs de New-York* (2006), *Vol. 2: Sur la route de Ramsès* (2007), *Vol. 3: Le théâtre de la nature de'Oklahoma* (2008).
11. Franz Kafka, *The Trial. A Graphic Novel*, illustrated by Chantal Montellier, adapted and translated by David Zane Mairowitz, London: Sterling, 2008.
12. *Vol. 1: L'Origine* (1990), *Vol. 2: La Qu..* (1991), *Vol. 3: Le Processus* (1993), *Vol. 4: Le Début de la fin* (1995), *Vol. 5: La 2,333e Dimension* (2004), *Vol. 6: Le Décalage* (2013).
13. Osamu Tezuka, *L'Ara aux sept couleurs / Nanairo Inko. Le meilleur d' Osamu Tezuka*, French version, Tome 1/2/3/4/5, Paris: Clélia Delaplace, 2004.



CHAPTER 11

Experiments in Cultural Connectivity: Early Twentieth-Century German-Jewish Thought Meets the *Daodejing*

Peter Fenves

Preliminary Remarks

In the middle of a fragment of a story that Franz Kafka wrote near the end of the First World War under the title "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer" (Building the Great Wall of China), he provides a description of a non-Chinese construction project: "You must admit," writes the narrator who presents himself as a minor figure in the construction of the wall, "that deeds were accomplished at that time that fell just short of the building of the Tower of Babel, although they were the opposite when it comes to being pleasing to God – at least according to human calculation. I mention this fact because during the early stages of construction a scholar published a book that explicated the comparisons very precisely."[1] Nowhere does the narrator of Kafka's story explain the basis on which the "scholar" compares the two gigantic construction projects. The scholar claims to have visited the ruins of the Tower of Babel; but it does not appear as though he has read the account of its collapse in the opening

P. Fenves (✉)
Department of German, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA
e-mail: p-fenves@northwestern.edu

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_11

book of the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, the biblical narrative informs the narrator's analysis of the comparison, for, as the quotation above indicates, he seems to understand the putative lesson of the narrative—and understand, furthermore, that this lesson is valuable "only according to human calculation." What is altogether missing from the comparison between the Great Wall of China and the Tower of Babel in Kafka's incomplete story of their comparison is what the biblical story of the Tower itself serves to explain, namely the multiplicity of languages and thus the diversity of cultures. One reason for the absence of any reference to linguistic differences and cultural diversity in Kafka's story can be immediately identified: the story proceeds as though it were exempt from the punishment that was inflicted upon humanity, according to the biblical story, as a consequence of the attempt to build a tower that reaches the heavens. In this regard, it is altogether appropriate for a member of the Chinese "literati" to have intimate knowledge of the biblical text, for the two cultures—Chinese and Jewish—would stand in some as yet undefined mode of linguistic-cultural connectivity. Kafka's story, which was never published in his lifetime, can be seen as an experiment in cultural connectivity.

Kafka is not alone among German-speaking Jews of the early decades of the twentieth century who looked to China for some "very exact comparisons"—to use, once again, Kafka's phrase—through which they could experiment with a situation in which they could experience themselves from a distance. The name of this distance is "China." But China is not simply a figure of distance; it is also understood to be a concrete place in which a corresponding scholarly community reflects on its culture from a certain distance. In creating the figure of a Chinese scholar who looks toward the Hebrew Bible to understand the rationale for the construction of the Great Wall, Kafka produces an image of German-speaking Jewish contemporaries, who examine fragments of Chinese culture in order to understand in an experimental manner their own fragmented plans and projects. This brief chapter will discuss only a small group of Kafka's contemporaries; indeed, it will be more restrictive still, for I will direct attention to only a single point of comparison. The group under discussion here is composed of Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, Franz Rosenzweig, Walter Benjamin, and finally Kafka himself, to whom I will return at the end. The sole point of comparison will be their encounters with the *Daodejing* in German translation. The larger point of this chapter—and its primary purpose—is to show a variety of Kafka-like experiments in cultural connectivity, which are not based on an actual "contact," but are not then

simply dismissible as self-images of a culture as imagined from afar. In reflecting on the contrast between the current situation of China in the immediate post-Imperial period and its glorious culture of classical learning, German-Jewish writers and thinkers could discern the elements of their own endangered situation. The point of attraction can be characterized in a more general manner. Jewish and Chinese cultures may be very different from each other, but they nevertheless experience something similar—a disorienting split between their original oral literary tradition, which is neither modern nor European, and their all-too-rapid assimilation to modern Western cultural norms. The experiments in cultural connectivity that are examined here capture the experience of this disorientation.

From Kafka to Buber

To begin the chapter again, this time with attention to the attractive force of the *Daodejing* among German-Jewish writers and thinkers from 1910 to 1920, I want to indicate very briefly the degree to which Kafka's story of the Great Wall engages with Laozi's text in its German translation. Immediately after the narrator of the story discusses the comparisons between the Tower and the Wall, he turns his attention to the situation of the enigmatic "leadership" under whose direction the Wall is built: "In the leadership office – where it was located and who occupied it, no one whom I asked knows or knew – in this office all human thoughts and desires went in circles [kreisten] and, in counter-circles [Gegenkreisen], there went all human goals and fulfillments."[2] Two circles, therefore, guide those who guide the great program of wall construction: one circle is that of desire, the other is that of its fulfillment. The key point, however, is that the two circles move in opposite direction. For this reason, the only way to fulfill a desire is not to desire anything; conversely, any attempt to attain a goal makes this goal altogether unattainable. Thus, for example, the construction of a defensive wall (if the Great Wall is meant to defend against "nomads") or the construction of an aggressive tower (if the Tower of Babel is indeed meant to storm the heavens) can be accomplished only if no one—here represented by the anonymous "leadership"—wants to do so. Compare the situation in the "office" of the "leadership" with the following passage from the 40th chapter of Alexander Ular's translation of the *Daodejing*, which was published by Insel Verlag in 1903: "Der ewige Kreislauf ist die Bahn der Bahn;/ Das Lassen ist das Tun der Bahn./ Die

Einzelnen Wesen wallen zum Leben,/ im Leben wallen zum Nichts."[3] Ular is fond of rendering the language of the *Daodejing* in terms of a circular motion ("Kreislauf"), and Kafka adopts the image of counteracting circles for his description of the situation of the "leadership": whoever tries to fulfill a desire is destined to fail; only one who lets things go their own way—in Ular's formulation, "Lassen ist das Tun der Bahn"—accomplishes the "nothing" they want to do.

For several years Buber had asked Kafka to contribute some of his stories to a widely read journal he edited under the provocative title *Der Jude* (The Jew). Kafka had initially refused; but for some reason—it is not clear why he changed his mind—in the spring of 1917, at the very moment in which he wrote "Building the Great Wall of China," he sent Buber twelve stories and asked him to choose two for the journal. One of the twelve stories, "Eine kaiserliche Botschaft" (An Imperial Messenger), is taken directly from "Building the Great Wall of China." Buber, as it happens, did not include this story in *Der Jude*. It is, of course, impossible to say precisely why he decided to do so. Perhaps he did not think that it would be appropriate for a journal that is specifically dedicated to Jewish themes; conversely, he may have perhaps worried that it departed from the image of China he had constructed in a selection of Zhuangzi's writings he edited and published in 1910, which included an afterword that he latter entitled "Die Lehre vom Tao" (The Doctrine of the Dao).[4] It would go beyond the scope of this chapter to describe in detail Buber's afterword to his edition of Zhuangzi, for any comprehensive analysis would involve not only an examination of the edition in question, but also a discussion of the massive program of philosophical-religious thought Buber developed since the early years of the twentieth century.[5] But here are a few broad themes that are required for an understanding of what he sought to accomplish in "The Doctrine of the Dao." First, Buber sharply distinguishes religion from religiosity, such that the latter (religiosity) is the creative eruption of a divine–human encounter, whereas the *former* (religion) is the ossified sediment of the encounter, which belatedly expresses itself in customs, prescribed beliefs, and regulations. (One can easily see that Buber thus transposes the young Nietzsche's opposition of Dionysian insight with Apollonian form into his own religious-philosophical categories.) Second, myth is the spontaneous expression of the divine–human encounter, and for precisely this reason—its non-rational source—it can never be captured in the form of a theological system or philosophical reconstruction. Third, Buber in this period (before the end of the First

World War) comfortably operates with certain ossified categories of Occident and Orient, and he therefore has no hesitation in discussing the difference between Eastern and Western peoples (including and especially Jews) in racial terms. This element of Buber's thought would lead one to suppose that there could be no "doctrine" in the West, much less a "doctrine of the Dao," for, as the word *Dao* indicates, "doctrine" ought to belong exclusively to the East. And it is important to emphasize that, for Buber, all "doctrine" is one, for it—the only doctrine—is solely concerned with its own immanent realization in the life of the one whose doctrine it is. "Doctrine does not encompass objects," Buber writes in the opening pages of his essay, "it has only one object, itself: the one that necessarily acts and does as it must. It stands beyond fact and value [...]. It knows how to say only one thing: the necessity that is realized in actual life."[6] And yet, despite the "Eastern" character of doctrine, there is, for Buber, a "Western" counterpart to the doctrine of the Buddha and Laozi. The counterpart can be found in the "Jewish-primitive Christian doctrine of the Divine Kingdom."[7] It may seem as though Buber is thus presenting two versions of "Western" doctrine, one Christian and the other Jewish; but this impression is mistaken. Here is indeed the fourth and final element of Buber's thought that is required here for the exposition of his reflections on the "Doctrine of the Dao": throughout his writings of this period, Buber explicitly denies that there is any essential difference between Jewish and primitive-Christian religiosity. Two different "religions" doubtless emerge out of such religiosity; but this difference has nothing to do with their creative source, which can broadly be described as Western religiosity.

So much for Buber's own, as it were, "official" doctrine: primitive Christianity and authentic Judaism attest to the very same religious eruption, and their doctrine of the kingdom of God—"the Kingdom of God is within you," so Jesus reportedly says (Luke 17:21)—is the Western counterpart to the Path of the Buddha and the Way of Laozi. Something in Buber's further exposition of the "Doctrine of the Dao," however, leads in another, less well-defined, thus less "official" direction. To use my own image, this direction can be understood as a form of cultural connectivity in which Laozi's situation is reflected in the modern, "Western" (German-speaking) Jew. Here, as always in this chapter, I will be schematic. The steps in the argument are as follows. First step: Buber distinguishes between Buddha and Jesus, on the one hand, and Laozi, on the other. Buddha and Jesus, in his view, are "visible" embodiments of doctrinal life;

that is, life not lived according to doctrine, but life that reveals the doctrine or teaching (*Lehre* means both "doctrine" and "teaching") of which they speak. In Laozi, by contrast, doctrine remains hidden (*Verborgen* in German) and so Laozi is hidden—and indeed, hidden even from himself. Similarly with Zhuangzi, who functions as Laozi's "apostle," in Buber's words. But he is not an apostle like Saint Paul, who preaches the doctrine of his master; rather, by way of parables that he learned from the *Daodejing*, Zhuangzi, according to Buber, dissuades any student from imagining that the master could ever be seen. Laozi's doctrine of the Way is thus different than the otherwise identical doctrines of Buddhism and primitive Christianity. But a path is thus opened for indicating—however obliquely—that the Jewish counterpart to primitive Christianity converges with the "doctrine of the Dao."

The key element that connects the doctrine of Judaism with that of the Tao is the hiddenness of anyone whose life is identical with doctrine. And with this, we can proceed to the second step of the argument I am presenting here. Buber claims that the revelation of the Tao in the figure of its sage or master does not stand beyond all changes but is, instead, the unity that unites transformational polarities: "The human being whose Way proceeds without transformation is not the perfect revelation of the Dao; rather, it is the human being who unites the purest unity with the strongest transformation."[8] As readers of Buber's contemporaneous *Reden über das Judentum* (Discourses on Judaism) would immediately recognize, the description of the master of the Dao exactly matches the call to which "Western" Jews are required to answer: they must transform the most extreme outer divisions, signaled by their own Western Easternness, into an inner unity.[9] In his *Discourses on Judaism*, Buber appealed to his German-speaking readers to transform their lives from a current state of self-divided hyper-activity to a newly resolute mode of modern–ancient and Western–Eastern active passivity, which he often described as "readiness" or "waiting." Instead of dissipating their energy through entertainment and business, they should become resolute and decisive; instead of being simply busy inhabitants of the modern metropolis, they should become a focal point where ancient Judaism becomes unified with the most recent expressions of Jewish religiosity; and instead of alternating between frenetic activity and a laziness that derives from boredom, they should unify the active and passive dimensions of their lives by waiting and preparing themselves for a future that is altogether unlike anything they have yet experienced. Readers of his reflections on "The Doctrine of the

Dao" can thus see their own situation reflected at the other end of the Eurasian landmass. The end of Buber's essay is particularly resonant with his contemporaneous exposition of the situation in which "Western" Judaism finds itself. Drawing attention to the concept of *wu-wei*, here translated as "Nichttun," Buber concludes his exposition of the Dao with a description of the paradoxically anti-political character of the political order that can be discerned in the treatise attributed to Laozi: "The true ruler frees the people from the violence of political authorities by allowing 'non-action' rather than power to hold sway [indem er statt Macht das 'Nichttun' walten läßt]."[10] With this description of a messianism without a recognizable messiah, Buber implicitly amends his earlier remarks about three modes of doctrine: the doctrines of Buddhism and primitive Christianity exalt a visible figure; by contrast, the doctrine of Laozi converges with Jewish doctrine, insofar as each insists on the ineluctable hiddenness of its sages. The "Westernness" of "Western" Judaism can be re-interpreted, in turn, as a form of hiddenness that "Western" Jews are allowed to maintain as they transform their outward division into inner unity. This is precisely the transformation Buber demands of his "Western" Jewish readership in the early decades of the twentieth century—appropriately hidden in "The Doctrine of the Dao."

From Buber to Benjamin

The enormous effect of Buber's writings on a generation of German-Jewish students in the early decades of the twentieth century can be measured by the following passage in Gershom Scholem's diary, which he wrote in November 1914, a few weeks before his 17th birthday: "I have much more of the [Hebrew] Bible than any orthodox Jew. This is doubtless because – to use a Buberian expression – I do not conceive of it as an object but, rather, as a subject of religiosity. As an object! That would be terrible. But to allow the personality, the enormous divine plenitude of its people to affect oneself – that is true enjoyment and beauty. Where is such a wistful book [sehnsüchtiges Buch] as this? I hope to find one in the *Daodejing*, even if it is in an entirely different manner – but still there."[11] From the evidence of Scholem's diaries, it is not clear whether he found a book that is similarly "wistful" to the Hebrew Bible; but when he met Walter Benjamin in July 1915, he mentions together two topics that instantly drew them into further discussion: "Spoke about Buber. Laozi."[12] Some three years later, Scholem is delighted to find that Benjamin's meticulously

ordered collection of books places the *Daodejing* in Richard Wilhelm's translation side by side with the Bible. Scholem records no further discussion with Benjamin about Laozi; but he discovers in 1918 a decisive feature of his friend's life: "Walter Benjamin's life is in deep parallel with Laozi."[13]

As for Benjamin's own conception of his relation to Laozi, it is doubtless more circumspect yet equally suggestive. Only once in all of his writings of the period does Benjamin actually quote the *Daodejing*. This occurs in a dense essay he wrote (and privately circulated) in 1914 or 1915 under the title "Die Metaphysik der Jugend" (Metaphysics of Youth), where he quotes the final lines of the 80th chapter of Wilhelm's translation as an epigraph for a section entitled "Das Tagebuch" (The Diary).[14] The paucity of direct references to the *Daodejing* does not demonstrate that Benjamin was uninterested in Laozi. Indeed, it could indicate the opposite, for Benjamin tended to avoid any "frontal assault"—this is his own image—on particularly delicate themes, writers, and thinkers.[15] The passage he quotes from the *Daodejing* can be read not only in terms of its relation to the theme of "diary" or, more literally, the "day book" (as opposed to a "night book"); it also addresses the "metaphysics of youth" as a whole. Here, again, brevity is required where an extensive argument would be more appropriate. In the following remarks, after outlining Benjamin's concept of youth, I will discuss how he saw in a contemporary book about the situation of China an analogue to the situation of contemporary youth in Europe, returned to the function of the passage from Laozi in "The Metaphysic of Youth," and then, finally, turned to his analysis of the corresponding situation of "Western," German-speaking Jewry.

For the young Benjamin, who was actively involved in a left-wing version of the student movement from 1912 to 1916, the "youth movement" does not simply derive from passing discontent among men and women of a certain age. Rather—here is the point where "the metaphysics of youth" begins—youth is defined by its mobile character. In brief, youth exists always only in transition. It would be a grave error, however, to conceive of the transitional character of youth as an evolution from childhood to adulthood; rather, youth simply *is* pure transition. Transition is its defining characteristic, without origin or telos. Youth thus occurs wherever transition—especially revolutionary-utopian transition—takes place. China circa 1910 is clearly among the places of transition. Prompted by a leader of the student movement with which Benjamin associated himself, he read Gu Hongming's collection of essays, *Chinas Verteidigung gegen europäische Ideen* (China's Defense against European Ideas), which

appeared in Richard Wilhelm's translation in 1911.[16] And as he writes to his friend Ludwig Strauss in 1912, he unexpectedly finds in Gu's reflections on the cultural situation of contemporary China "an ideal and a program" 理想和规划 that closely resembles his own; but the value of *China's Defense against European Ideas*, for Benjamin, is magnified by its recognition of the menace that also threatens contemporary European youth: "[Gu] sees with horror the danger for contemporary China, namely the danger that it can be violated by the cynical, industrial spirit of Europe."[17] It is in the context of reflecting on *China's Defense against European Ideas* that he appears to have acquired a copy of Wilhelm's translation of the *Daodejing*. And it is in the same context that Benjamin, again writing to Ludwig Strauss, presents a corresponding conception of the situation in which contemporary German Jewry finds itself.[18] All of these situations are eminently transitional, and each of them encounters the danger Benjamin explicitly identifies in his response to Gu's collection of essays: the danger consists in transforming a transitional situation into a project of assimilating into the "cynical, industrial spirit of Europe." And each of the situations is thus connected with the other two.

From Benjamin to Kafka's Students

Benjamin quotes the same passage from the end of the 80th chapter of Richard Wilhelm's translation of the *Daodejing* 20 years after he wrote "The Metaphysics of Youth." No other passage of the *Daodejing* appears in his writings—despite the evident fact that he was familiar with Laozi's work in Wilhelm's and other translations. The quotation of the same passage is repeated for other reasons as well. Despite Benjamin's own interest in the concept of "Lehre" (doctrine), he, unlike Buber, does not attempt to produce a doctrinal exposition of "the doctrine of the Dao." Rather, he only cites this one image—as though it, as it were, contained the said doctrine in its entirety. As for the content of the image to which Benjamin directs his attention, it is remarkable, above all, because it describes in altogether positive terms the total absence of movement. But the absence of movement does not have to be understood as a static condition in which no transition takes place; rather, as Benjamin suggests in both 1914 and 1934, the following image of non-movement communicates the idea of pure transition. The image is all the more suggestive because it is not so much concerned with the lack of individual mobility as with the status of a community in which all motivation for outward movement is removed:

"Nachbarländer mögen in Sehweite liegen/ Daß man den Ruf der Hähne und Hunde/ gegenseitig hören kann./ Und doch sollten die Leute im höchsten Alter sterben/ Ohne hin und her gereist zu sein."[19] Insofar as outward movement culminates in aggressive domination, this description of village peace serves as a concealed image of messianic completion.

Benjamin cites this passage of the *Daodejing* in the final section of his essay "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," which appeared in 1934, soon after the Nazi seizure of power in Germany. Benjamin's essay on Kafka, originally published in the *Jüdische Rundschau* (Jewish Review), repeatedly draws attention to China—not directly, to be sure, but rather through the mediation of Franz Rosenzweig, who paints several portraits of Chinese religiosity in the opening sections of his massive work *Der Stern der Erlösung* (The Star of Redemption). Here, for the last time, I am going to apologize for the brevity of my discussion, as I confine my discussion of *The Star of Redemption* to a single remark. As with Buber, Rosenzweig's presentation of Laozi strongly suggests that the concept of *wu-wei* is akin to the active passivity that characterizes Jewish messianism; but the systematic intention of Rosenzweig's *magnum opus* effectively obstructs any recognition of the affinity between the doctrine of Dao and the Jewish messianic tradition, for Rosenzweig's discussion of *wu-wei* stands at the beginning of his systematic theology, while his exposition of Jewish messianic non-action comes only at the very end. Benjamin, for his part, shows no interest in *The Star of Redemption* as a philosophico-theological system and, indeed, nowhere mentions its analysis of Judaism; rather, he cites Rosenzweig's *opus* only for its portrait of Chinese religiosity in a broader effort to represent the relation between the life of Kafka and that of Laozi. As discussed above, in his diary of 1914 Scholem says of Benjamin that his life runs in parallel with Laozi's. Twenty years later, Benjamin presents Kafka as Laozi's student. Benjamin explicitly calls Kafka "Laozi's student" in private conversation; but he indicates as much in the concluding sections of his published essay.[20] As for what Kafka learns from Laozi, it is evidently the doctrine of transition through non-action. And the figure in Kafka's work who accomplishes such transition is the student. Here, one could say, is the perfection of the "student movement," wherein students study for the sake of studying, not so that they gain either knowledge or a profession. If one were to ask for a further characterization of such students, whose way of studying makes them appear fools, only a negative description would be appropriate: the students in Kafka—which includes Kafka as student of Laozi and Benjamin as student of Kafka—counteract the "cynical, industrial spirit of Europe."

Toward a Conclusion

This chapter, so far, has been a brief account of various experiments in unexpected cultural connectivity. The writers under consideration here, from Kafka to Benjamin, could be characterized as willing or unwilling participants in a certain "orientalist" tradition, in which abstract conceptions of China, drawn from perhaps dubious sources, serve as fictive points of reference in a discourse that is concerned with nothing so much as constructing a positive self-image. To a certain extent, this characterization is valid—above all, because in no instance is there a determinate resolution to understand any dimension of Chinese history, literature, or culture "from the inside." In at least one case—I am thinking here of Rosenzweig's portrait of China—the use of the term "orientalism" is not only valid, but also seems accurate. But it is worth noting that Benjamin, for his part, runs counter to Rosenzweig's intention by taking his portrait of China outside of its place in his system of theology, thus effectively disposing of its orientalist tendency. And something similar happens in all the other writers under consideration. Kafka, Buber, and Benjamin, each in his own way, obliquely indicate that their own situations are connected to the situation they associate with China, and the medium of this connection is the *Daodejing*. The point of drawing attention to the possibility of a connection with China has nothing to do with the attempt to create a positive self-image through the negative characterization of another culture; rather, in each case, the connection is presented as a puzzle, which deserves attention because the connection may be objectively valid, even if there are no causal lines of communication through which one situation (German Jewry in transition) affects the other (China in transition), or vice versa.

In this regard, I return to where this chapter began: with Kafka's depiction of a Chinese "scholar" who, without any preparation or explanation, compares the Great Wall of China with the Tower of Babel. According to the narrator of Kafka's story, this scholar fails to accomplish his goal of persuasively demonstrating that the two grand construction projects are in fact connected; but as the narrator turns away from the comparison of the Wall with the Tower and begins to discuss another matter—it is at this point, as I noted above, where Kafka appears to have drawn on the imagery of the *Daodejing*—he indicates that the error of the Chinese scholar may not have been in seeking to connect the two construction projects, but rather in his attempt to find a causal principle by which the Wall and the Tower are connected. The error of the comparison-minded scholar, in brief, consists in his argument that the Wall is supposed to serve as the

foundation of the new Tower. In this way, one construction project (we could also use the words "culture" or "civilization") is seen as either higher or more fundamental than the other. If, however, the two construction projects are not assumed to be connected to each other in a causal manner, if one construction project is seen as neither higher nor more fundamental than the other, then the comparison may be allowed to stand. The resulting connection between the situation of the two communities of builders is doubtless ever so tenuous; but the very absence of causal lines of support keeps the connection alive.

References

1. Franz Kafka, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1994), 6: 69.
2. Kafka, *Gesammelte Werke*, 6: 70.
3. Lao-Tzi, *Die Bahn und der rechte Weg des Lao-Tzi*, trans. Alexander Ular (Leipzig: Insel, 1903), 30. I provide no translation only because it is unnecessary to translate this particular translation.
4. Martin Buber, *Reden und Gleichnisse des Tsuang-Tse*, ed. Martin Buber (Leipzig: &, 1910), 82–122; reprinted under the title "Die Lehre vom Tao" in *Die Rede, die Lehre und das Lied: Drei Beispiele* (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1917), 35–94. All quotations in this chapter are drawn from the 1917 edition that includes the title.
5. See Martin Buber, *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachmann* (Frankfurt: Rütter and Loening, 1906).
6. Buber, "Das Lehre vom Tao," 40.
7. Buber, "Das Lehre vom Tao," 53.
8. Buber, "Das Lehre vom Tao," 75.
9. See Martin Buber, *Drei Reden über das Judentum* (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening, 1911). (The original version of "Die Lehre vom Tao" was delivered in lectures at the very same time.)
10. Buber, "Das Lehre vom Tao," 93.
11. Gershom Scholem, *Tagebücher, nebst Aufsätzen und Entwürfen bis 1923*, ed. Karlfried Gründer, Herbert Kopp-Oberstebrink und Friedrich Niewöhner unter Mitwirkung von Karl E. Grözinger (Jüdischer Verlag: Frankurt am Main, 1995–2000), 1: 51.
12. Scholem, *Tagebücher*, 1: 133; Scholem later indicates in his diary that Benjamin owned a copy of the other major edition of the *Daodejing* in this period, namely *Taoteking: Das Buch des Alten vom Sinn und Leben*, trans. Richard Wilhelm (Diederich: Jena: 1911); see Scholem, *Tagebücher*, 1: 133.

13. Scholem, *Tagebücher*, 2: 146.
14. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972–91), 2: 96.
15. Benjamin uses the phrase “frontal assault” in a letter to Hugo von Hofmannstahl; see Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, ed. Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995–), 2: 410.
16. Ku Hung-Ming, *Chinas Verteidigung gegen europäische Ideen*, trans. Richard Wilhelm, intro. Alfons Pacquet (Jena: Diederich, 1911).
17. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 1: 77.
18. See Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 1: &.
19. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2: 96; *Taoteking*, 85. A standard English translation can be found in D. C. Lau’s edition: “Though adjoining states are within sight of one another,/ And the sound of dogs barking and cocks crowing in one state can be heard in another,/ yet the people of one state will grow old and die without having had any dealings with those of another” (*Tao Te Ching*, trans. D. C. Lau [New York: Penguin, 1963], 80).
20. See Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2: 1254. The phrase, so it seems, stems from Brecht; but it may have been suggested by Benjamin.



CHAPTER 12

Ideographic Myth and Misconceptions about Chinese Poetic Art

Cai Zongqi

What is unique about Chinese poetic art? To what extent has the Chinese language given rise to it? These questions were not raised by traditional Chinese critics working exclusively within their own tradition. Not until Chinese poetry came to the West in the eighteenth century did such questions begin to emerge and engage Sinologists and lovers of Chinese culture. In the early twentieth century, Ezra Pound brought out Ernest Fenollosa's essay "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry." This not only gave a new direction to modern American poetry,[1] but inspired an upsurge of efforts by mid-century Sinologists to unlock the

For highlights of Cai's theory on the relationship between the Chinese language and Chinese poetic art, see Zong-qi Cai, "Sound over Ideograph: The Basis of Chinese Poetic Art." In *Sound and Sense of Chinese Poetry*, ed. Zong-qi Cai, *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 2.2 (2015): 251–257.

Cai Zongqi (✉)
Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL, USA

Department of Chinese, Lingnan University of Hong Kong, Tuen Mun, Hong Kong
e-mail: z-cai@illinois.edu

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_12

secret of Chinese poetic art by tracing its roots to Chinese writing. Seminal in this vein are Peter A. Boodberg on the "semasiology" of Chinese political and literary concepts,[2] and Ch'en Shih-hsiang's and Chow Tse-tsung's etymological studies of key characters associated with poetry-making.[3] By now this linguistic approach to Chinese poetry has been widely embraced by Chinese scholars and Sinologists alike.

While Sinologists had a unique advantage over native Chinese scholars in identifying what was unique about Chinese poetic art from a comparative perspective, some of them suffered from being unduly influenced by the Western "ideographic myth" about Chinese characters, dating back to the sixteenth century and brought to a climax by the Fenollosa–Pound essay. Because of this, some scholars overemphasized the impact of Chinese orthography on Chinese poetry to the neglect of the primacy of sound in Chinese poetry, a subject I will discuss in a separate paper.

The Misconstrued Importance of Ideographic Structure

Invented in sixteenth-century Europe, the "ideographic myth"—the notion that all Chinese written characters are pictorial—has long been used either to romanticize or to denigrate the Chinese language and culture compared to those of the West. Only with the appearance of the Fenollosa–Pound essay "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry" did Chinese written characters start to be seen as a fruitful medium for poetic creation. Closely examined, however, this essay is not in fact primarily concerned with the pictorial quality of Chinese characters for its own sake. Only rarely does the essay comment on the "semi-pictorial effects" of Chinese characters. And even then, Fenollosa and Pound stress that these characters are "based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operations of nature"[4] and that "their ideographic roots carry in them a verbal idea of action."[5] In other words, Pound and Fenellosa were primarily fascinated with the dynamic forces of nature thereby revealed pictorially. In fact, as early as 1916, Pound himself called attention to this when he asked a friend to "see Fenollosa's big essay on verbs, mostly on verbs."[6] In analyzing the syntactic linkage of Chinese characters, Fenollosa and Pound sought to show how effectively a Chinese sentence conjures up "transferences of force from agent to object."[7] To them, a Chinese sentence does not involve what they called "weakness of our own formalism"[8] (articles, inflections, conjugation, intransitiveness, etc.). As a result, they envisioned "literally the parts of speech growing up, budding forth one from another,"[9] a process that closely reproduces the transferences of force in nature.

To accentuate this point, they gave a simple example:

> 人 見 馬
>
> Man sees horse
>
> […] First stands the man on his two legs. Second, his eye moves through space: a bold figure represented by running legs under an eye, a modified picture of an eye, a modified picture of running legs, but unforgettable once you have seen it. Third stands the horse on his four legs.
>
> The thought-picture is not only called up by these signs as well as by words, but far more vividly and concretely. Legs belong to all three characters: they are *alive*. The group holds something of the quality of a continuous moving picture.[10]

They then clarified that, unlike in English, we split up the rapid continuity of this action and of its picture into three essential parts or joints—the three phonetic symbols—in the right order. Chinese notation is something much more than arbitrary symbols, and so Chinese poetry has the unique advantage of combining both elements. It speaks at once with the vividness of painting, and with the mobility of sounds. They also put up another example, the sun rises (in the) east (日東昇), and pointed out the sign of the east, which is the sun entangled in the branches of a tree. And in the middle sign, the verb "rise" means that the sun is above the horizon. But beyond that, the single upright line is like the growing trunk-line of the tree sign. By means of a few examples like this, Fenollosa and Pound aimed to underscore the unique capacity of Chinese characters to evoke the dynamic force of nature through ideographic, morphological, and syntactical construction.

While favorably received in Western literary circles, the Fenollosa–Pound essay became the target of widespread criticism by both linguists and literary scholars in Sinological circles. For instance, the late James J. Y. Liu argued that the essay perpetuates the fallacy that "Chinese characters are pictograms or ideograms," and begins his book *The Art of Chinese Poetry* with a critique of Fenollosa/Pound on Chinese characters.[11] Ironically, such critiques only brought Chinese written characters more attention and inspired new waves of investigation into the ideographic roots of key literary terms like *shi* 诗 (poetry) and *xing* 兴 (evocation, affective image) by scholars hoping to reconstruct the earliest acts of poetry-making. Undeterred by harsh censure of the Fenollosa–Pound "ideographic myth," some scholars even ventured to apply it to illuminate the uniqueness of Chinese poetic art—the French Sinologist François Cheng being a prime example.

In the preface to his influential *L'Écriture poétique chinoise*, subsequently translated into English and Chinese,[12] François Cheng surreptitiously and yet unmistakably avails himself of the Fenollosa–Pound theory in defining the overarching principle of Chinese poetry and arts in general. "Inspired by the ideographic writing and determined by it," he declares, "poetry, calligraphy, painting, and myth form a semiotic network both complex and unified; all share in the same process of symbolization, and obey certain fundamental rules of opposition."[13] What he calls here "semiotic network" and "process of symbolization" are nothing else than a sequence of ideographic symbols or (per Fenollosa–Pound) "a continuous moving picture," or rather "a vivid shorthand picture of the operations of nature." To illustrate this extraordinary potency of Chinese characters, Fenollosa and Pound used the simple sentence "Man sees horse." As if to one-up them, Cheng opts for poetry by Tang poets Wang Wei (701?–761), Liu Changqing (709?–786?), and Du Fu (712–770).[14] Commenting on a five-character line by Wang Wei, Cheng observes:

> Rather than using a denotative language to explain this experience, he [Wang Wei] contents himself, in the first line of the quatrain, with aligning five characters.
>
> 木 末 芙 蓉 花
>
> branch end hibiscus flowers
>
> […] Viewing these characters gives the visual impression of the process of a tree blossoming into flower (first character: a bare tree; second character: something is born at the end of the branches; third character, a bud breaks out, ++ being the radical of grass or flower; fourth character: the bursting open of the bud; fifth character: a flower in its fullness).[15]

Clearly, Cheng's explication is more imaginative and sophisticated than that of Fenollosa and Pound. Fenollosa and Pound wished to show that "in reading Chinese we do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be watching *things* work out their own fate,"[16] but their example "Man sees horse" fails miserably, because it just depicts a simple human action rather than natural things working out their fate. Cheng's example eminently accomplishes what Fenollosa and Pound failed to achieve. According to Cheng, Wang Wei's line lays bare a long process of the hibiscus flowers growing from incipiency to full bloom. To Cheng, the fact that a mere five characters could capture a long process of change in a cinematic fashion attests to Chinese characters' nonpareil power of revelation. What is more,

Cheng even sees a mystical dimension thanks to an integration of the "man" ideograph into the last three of these five characters:

> […] a reader who is familiar with the language will not fail to note in addition, through the ideograms, a subtly hidden idea, that of the man who enters the tree in spirit and who therefore participates in its metamorphosis. The third character (芙) contains the element 夫 "man", which itself contains the element 人 "Man" (homo); thus, the tree presented by the first two characters is from this point onward inhabited by the presence of the man. The fourth character (蓉) contains 容 "face" (the bud breaks out into a face), which contains the element 口 "mouth" (this speaks). And finally, the fifth character contains the element 化 "transformation" (man participating in the universal transformation). By an economy of means, and without recourse to external commentary, the poet creates, before our eyes, in its successive states, a mystical experience.[17]

Here, Fenollosa and Pound's reading of "Man sees horse" pales in comparison with Cheng's reading of Wang Wei's five-character line. Cheng conjures up Wang Wei purposely. For Cheng, reading these five characters yields "a mystical experience": the five characters, by virtue of their ideographic components alone, reveal not only the cosmic process invisibly at work behind the growth of flowers, but also man's participation in this process! On that basis, Cheng can claim that ideographic writing has inspired and determined Chinese poetic art. This mystifying (in his own words) of Wang Wei's line undoubtedly represents a consummate application of the "ideographic myth" to literary criticism.

But would any reader of Chinese poetry—past or present—read so much and so profoundly into the simple statement that there is a hibiscus flower at the tip of a branch? Most likely not—unless he or she is a fervent subscriber to the "ideographic myth," like Cheng. This particular example aside, we can also test Cheng's broader claim by asking if the poetic lines cited really exemplify a widespread, longstanding poetic practice. Again, the answer has to be: no. Measured against the huge corpus of Chinese poetry, the number of similar lines is negligible at best. That being the case, to make a rare poetic practice into an epitome of Chinese poetic art becomes untenable.

In fact, from time to time some Chinese poets do consciously make successive use of characters with identical radicals. But in doing this, are they really trying to accomplish what Cheng says? By way of an answer, consider the following excerpts from Guo Pu's 郭璞 (276–324) "Rhapsody on the Yangzi River" 江赋[18]:

	IV	
	As for	若乃
	The gorges east of Ba	巴东之峡
46	Dredged and bored by the Lord of Xia:	夏后疏凿
	Sheer banks, one hundred thousand feet high,	绝岸万丈
48	Wall-like stand, streaked like rosy clouds;	壁立赮驳
	Tiger Fangs boldly juts, steeply spiring;	虎牙嵥竖以屹崒
50	Thorn Portal towers like a gate way, broad and boundless,	荆门阙竦而盘礴
	Vortical pools in swirls of nine, plunge and surge,	圆渊九回以悬腾
52	Their spurting flow roaring like thunder, shooting like lightning.	湓流雷呴而电激
	Startled billows suddenly scatter,	骇浪暴灑
54	Frightened waves soar and pound;	惊波飞薄
	Swift eddies gyring in layers,	迅澓增澆
56	Raging rapids leaping in folds,	湧湍叠跃
	Batter the cliffs, astir and aroused,	砯岩鼓作
58	Thrashing and lashing, raging and roaring,	潝渮瀺灂皆大波相激之聲也。
	Surging and swelling, troublous and turbulent,	漬濩潰瀄皆水势相激汹涌之貌。
60	Spreading and sprawling, crashing and colliding,	潏湟淴泱，瀹皆水流漂疾之貌
	Dashing and darting, scurrying and scudding,	漩澴滎瀯
62	Swiftly streaking, rapidly rushing,	溭淵濆瀑皆波浪回旋喷涌而起之也。
	Raging and racing, pitching and plunging,	溭淢濜涓
66	Laced and linked like dragon scales.	龙鳞结络
	Prase-colored sand tosses and tumbles to and fro,	碧沙瀢而往來
68	Giant rocks, jaggedly jutting, advance and retreat:	巨石硉矶以前却
	Wherever the submerged flow gushes and spouts,	潛演之所汩淈
70	Or where the hastening current grinds and grates,	奔溜之所磢错
	Banks and bluffs become crannied scarps,	燣隒為之泐嵃
72	Twisting shores and mountain ridges become creviced cliffs,	崎嶺為之喦崿
	Piled boulders in secluded streams,	幽涧积岨
74	Become scraped and scored, pitted and pocked.	礐硞謠礭
	V	
	And now	若乃
	Reservoirs of plunging abysses,	曾潭之府

76	Pools of haunted lakes:	灵湖之淵
	Crystal clear, spaciously sparkling,	澄澹汪洸
78	Flowing and flooding, deep and diluvian,	瀇滉瘍泫
	Broad and boundless, rolling and reeling,	泓汯泂澋
80	Twisting and twirling, turning and churning	涒鄰淵潾
	Bubbling bright, limpid and lucent,	混澣灦渙
82	Streaming with luster, casting off radiance,	流映扬焆
	Wasteful and wide, distantly distended	溟滓渺湎
84	Boundless spread, vast and far	汗汗沺沺
	Examine them, and they are without form;	察之无象
86	Explore them, and they are without end.	寻之无边
	Vapors, spuming and fuming, thick as fog,	气滃渤以雾杳
88	At times dark and dense as smoke,	時郁律其如烟
	Simulate primal chaos before matter congealed,	类胚渾之未凝
90	Resemble the Grand Culmen that forms the sky	象太极之构天
	VI	
	Long swells spaciously spread,	长波浹渫
92	Steep rapids precipitously piled,	峻湍崔嵬
	Whirling eddies twisting like winding ravines,	盘渦谷转
94	Racing waves tumbling like collapsing hills;	淩濤山颓
	Lord Yang, towering tall, rising like a bluff,	阳侯砐硪以岸起
96	Giant billows, sinuously stretching, rolling like clouds,	洪瀾涴演而云回
	Twirling and swirling, pitching and plunging,	沍淪流瀼
98	Now sunken, now cresting;	乍邑乍堆
	Agape as if Earth had split,	豃如地裂
100	Widemouthed, as if Heaven had opened;	豁若天开
	Batter meandering banks, wind and weave,	触曲厓以萦绕
102	Panic collapsing waves, smashing one another,	骇崩浪而相礧
	Drum against caves and caverns, roaring and rumbling,	鼓㕨窟以漰渤
104	Then spouting and spurting, mount the banks.	乃湓湧而驾隈

These three sections contain a total of 292 characters, with as many as 104 (about 35.62%) of them displaying a “water” radical, as shown by boldface above. In the history of classical Chinese poetry, I cannot think of any work employing a greater number of characters with an identical radical than this rhapsody. We can adduce three major reasons for it. First, the work seeks to overwhelm the reader with an exhaustive mass of water-related images, so it is only natural for the poet to employ a huge number of water-radical characters. Second, rhapsody writers of the time typically try to show off the monstrous range of their vocabulary. Guo’s successive use of 104 water-radical characters (many of which are archaic and abstruse) makes for a consummate display of linguistic and literary talent. If any serious artistic purpose is involved, it might be Guo’s attempt to capture the overpowering sound and sight of raging waves via a series of twin reduplicatives made up of water-radical characters (see the underlined verses above). In piling up these water-radical reduplicatives, Guo simply seeks to amplify and dramatize sense impressions through excessive cataloguing. There is no hint whatsoever that he finds himself witnessing a cosmic process subtly unfolding in nature—as Cheng would have us believe.

The next example is a pentasyllabic quatrain, composed by an anonymous poet of the Tang dynasty and made up entirely of characters containing the walk radical:

A poem composed with walk-radical characters	走字边诗	
	The Changsha Kiln version	*The Dunhuang version*
Sending off afar, yet we take things in strides, Being free of constrains by the roadside. People run into one after, whether nearby or far away Striving or withdrawing, one rides the flow of things.	遠送還通達, 逍遙近道邊。 遇逢遐邇過, 進退隨遛連。	**送遠**還通達, 逍遙近道邊。 遇逢遐邇過, 進退**速遊**連。

As shown above, this poem has two slightly variant versions. The text to the left was inscribed under the glaze of a pottery bowl discovered at the Changsha Kiln (an important site of pottery production during the Tang). The text to the right comes from a Dunhuang manuscript scroll. So the same poem was found preserved in radically different material forms, at two locations separated by intractable terrains and climates,

several thousand miles apart. Even in this age of high-speed trains, Changsha of verdant Southern China and Dunhuang of barren Northwestern China are hardly ever associated with each other. The fact that the same poem turned up, at more or less the same time, in these two places is truly puzzling. In my opinion, there are two possible explanations. First: that the poem was so popular, it spread beyond the boundaries of China proper all the way to the outpost of Dunhuang. Second: that the Changsha Kiln wares were then popular items of export to Central Asia and a scribe at the Dunhuang Grotto happened to see the poem written on the bowl and copied it down on a scroll. The second explanation seems more plausible. We might also ask whether this poem indicates a popular Tang pastime, that of writing poems with characters containing an identical radical. If such a pastime did exist, we might wonder whether Wang Wei and Du Fu were influenced by it. Of course, this is hardly the place to pursue this query and we should now return to the artistic merit of the poem. Judging by its content and style, it would appear to have been written by someone with limited literary talent or training—almost certainly not by a literati poet of stature. In this poem, we find no evidence of a heightened sensibility to sound and sight, such as that shown by Guo Pu in his “Rhapsody on the Yangzi River.” Undoubtedly the present poem represents a studied consideration of ideographic components in the choice of characters, driven most likely merely by a pedestrian desire for the entertainment of a language game. Thus the end product: a hodgepodge of walking-radical characters devoid of any visual or auditory appeal. How could such a poem ever be seen as a sublime attempt to reveal the cosmic process through an interplay of ideographic elements?

Next, we should consider if and how traditional Chinese critics perceived an ideographic factor shaping Chinese poetic art. If a sequence of identical or similar ideographic components is so conducive to revealing the perceived inner process of nature (as Cheng claims), there ought to be plenty of discussion on the subject by traditional Chinese critics. But that just isn’t the case. In the history of Chinese literary criticism, only one essay stands out, seriously probing how a writer should consider the ideographic factor when choosing his characters. That essay is the “Lianzi” 练字 (Choice of Characters) chapter in Liu Xie’s (465?–520?) *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龙 (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons). There, Liu sets forth four basic principles for choosing characters:

> As the mind entrusts its sound in speech, speech takes form in characters. In recitation our accomplishment is measured in terms of musicality, and in writing our ability is demonstrated by the form of characters chosen.
>
> In combining characters to compose a piece, a writer must weigh his choice. First of all, uncommon characters are to be avoided; second, characters with identical radicals should be sparingly used; third, any repetition of the same character should be carefully weighed; and fourth, simple and complex forms must be balanced.
>
> 心既托声于言, 言亦寄形于字, 讽诵则绩在宫商, 临文则能归字形矣。是以缀字属篇, 必须拣择: 一避诡异, 二省联边, 三权重出, 四调单复.[19]

Note that the second principle offers an explicit caution against successive use of characters with identical radicals. Liu explains, "'Characters with identical radicals' means several characters having the one same half. A successive use of characters, for capturing the appearance of mountains and rivers, can be found in both past and present. But if applied to normal writing, it is awkward and defective. If it cannot be avoided, it is permissible to have three such characters. But if the number goes beyond three, it will be a glossary list" 联边者, 半字同文者也。状貌山川, 古今咸用, 施于常文, 则龃龉为瑕, 如不获免, 可至三接, 三接之外, 其字林乎.[20] Although Liu Xie approves a successive use of characters with an identical radical for depicting nature, he sees its value primarily in capturing "shape and appearance" 形貌, just as Guo Pu has done in "Rhapsody on the Yangzi River." Nor does Liu seem to have imagined that a poet would seek to reveal the cosmic process through ideographic maneuvering, as Cheng boldly claims. On the contrary, Liu issues an unequivocal caution against such a maneuver in normal writing.

In sum, then, the facts stack up against Cheng's ideographic theory. First, we find only one critical essay written on the subject, showing scant interest among Chinese poets in exploring ideographic structures for serious literary purposes. If ideographic structures were as central to Chinese poetic art as Cheng claims, we ought to have an abundance of remarks and discussion. Second, the solitary essay by Liu Xie deals primarily with pitfalls in the choice of characters. It hardly touches on the benefit of ideographic structure. Instead, all four basic principles are couched in negative or cautionary terms. Third, as noted above, Liu's third principle explicitly warns against what Cheng raves about: a successive use of characters with an identical character. Fourth, Liu's four principles are concerned with the calligraphic presentation of a composed work as much as—if not more

than—the creative process. In fact, the fourth principle, a proper balance of "bony characters" (characters of few strokes) with "plump characters" (many strokes), pertains almost exclusively to calligraphic presentation.

Given the weight of evidence against Cheng's ideographic theory, it seems only natural to conclude that ideographic structure is insignificant with regard to Chinese poetic art. It is difficult not to regard Cheng's theory as a fallacy, one that has taken the "ideographic myth" to an unprecedented height in the literary field. Here we cannot help but wonder if Cheng himself, a renowned scholar, poet, and calligrapher who knows Chinese poetic tradition from the inside out, really believes that Chinese poetic art depends in no small measure on exploiting ideographic structures, as he has argued. In my opinion, his embrace of the "ideographic myth" might well be motivated by his desire to speak in an idiom familiar to Western readers—especially after Derrida and post-structuralism. By tapping a centuries-old Western fascination with Chinese characters, he apparently aims to gently lead readers into the wonderland of Chinese poetry. So our criticism of his work should be tempered with applause for his effort to promote cross-cultural understanding.

References

1. Andrew Welsh calls this essay "one of the high points of modern poetics" (*Roots of Lyric: Primitive Poetry and Modern Poetics.* Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978, pp. 101) and devotes a long chapter of his book to Fenollosa–Pound's theory of the ideograph. Welsh's remark seems to sum up all the laudatory comments on the essay in Western literary circles.
2. Peter A. Boodberg, "The Semasiology of Some Primary Confucian Concepts," *Philosophy East and West* 2.4 (1953), pp. 317–332.
3. See Ch'en Shih-hsiang, "*The Shih Ching*: Its Generic Significance in Chinese Literary Theory and Poetics," *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology (Academia Sinica)* 39, no. 1 (1968), pp. 371–413; reprinted in *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres*, edited by Cyril Birch. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, pp. 8–41.
4. Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, ed. Ezra Pound. San Francisco: City Lights, 1983, p. 8. (Reprint; originally published in 1936).
5. Fenollosa and Pound, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, p. 9.
6. D. D. Paige, ed., *The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907–1941.* New York: Haskell, 1974, p. 131.

7. Fenollosa and Pound, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, p. 7.
8. Fenollosa and Pound, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, p. 17.
9. Fenollosa and Pound, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, p. 17.
10. Fenollosa and Pound, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, pp. 8–9.
11. *The Art of Chinese Poetry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, pp. 3–7.
12. See François Cheng, *Chinese Poetic Writing*, translated from French by Donald A. Riggs and Jerome P. Seaton. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982. For the Chinese translation of this book, see Baoyi 程抱一, *Studies on Chinese Poetry, Painting, and Language* 中国诗画语言研究, trans. by Tu Weiqu 涂卫群. Nanjing: Jiangshu renmin chubanshe, 2006.
13. François Cheng, *Chinese Poetic Writing*, p. 7.
14. François Cheng, *Chinese Poetic Writing*, p. 9–11.
15. François Cheng, *Chinese Poetic Writing*, pp. 9–10.
16. Fenollosa and Pound, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, p. 9.
17. François Cheng, *Chinese Poetic Writing*, pp. 9–10.
18. 萧统:《文选》Xiao Tong (compiler), *Wenxuan* (Selections of Refined Literature), commentary by Li Shan 李善. (Reprint:) Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977, pp. 184–185; David Knechtges, trans., *Wen xuan, or, Selections of Refined Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, pp. 325–329.
19. 詹锳:《文心雕龙义证》Zhan Ying, *Wenxin diaolong yizheng* (Investigations of the Meanings of *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989, pp. 1461–1463.
20. Zhan Ying, *Wenxin diaolong yizheng*, p. 1465.



CHAPTER 13

Chinese Literature as Part of World Literature

Karl-Heinz Pohl

The sciences—according to a common understanding—possess a universalistic claim. As a rule, we try to establish universally valid theories and definitions beyond particular cultural phenomenal differences. But the sciences are also a modern European invention. And so it is not surprising that, everywhere in the world, scientific concepts and categories are determined on the basis of one particular cultural—namely, European/American—provenance. This trend is reinforced by the fact that, in the course of modernization, almost everywhere in the world European/American views have been adopted unquestioningly as standards. The following assessment, which is by an African, could just as well apply to a Chinese:

> Which European could ever praise himself (or complain about) having put as much time, studies and effort into the learning of another 'traditional' society as the thousands of Third-World intellectuals who have studied in the school of Europe?[1]

K.-H. Pohl (✉)
Trier University, Trier, Germany
e-mail: pohlk@uni-trier.de

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_13

In other words, "Western modernity" is only the continuation of a long, *local cultural* tradition.

"Comparative literature" is part of this Euro-centric academic (or scientific) endeavor. Thus, a modern and, in Europe, common understanding of literature which starts from its own tradition—namely, Homeric epics and Greek dramas, culminating in the novel and drama of modern times—tends to put the fictional nature as an overarching characterization of literature in the foreground. Literature, however, as part of the humanities, is also historically—and now also comparatively—oriented. This means, in view of a concept of literature, that the discussion of such a topic can only proceed on the basis of historical genesis, and in comparison with the notion of literature in other cultures. Hence, concepts of literature, different from Western notions, should be taken note of when discussing any national literature in the context of world literature, and thus also Chinese literature. As will become apparent below, after having gained a view of China's example, fictionality might not suffice as a universal quintessence of literature.

In the following, first a Chinese understanding of literature will be traced from pre-modernity to modernity. Needless to say, this will not constitute an attempt to impose an all-embracing comprehensive concept of literature on more than 2000 years of Chinese history of literature—such concerns would rightly be regarded as unhistorical and generalizing and should thus be rejected. Rather, in a historical overview, trends will be identified from which an approach to a traditional Chinese concept of literature might be possible. Against this backdrop and secondly, the relevance of Chinese literature within a (Western) concept of world literature will be discussed, and this on the basis of a representative collection: *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* (in six volumes). Thereafter, I will conclude by turning to Goethe's idea of world literature, which he conceived of mainly through an encounter with Chinese literature.

Chinese Writing and Written Language

The "literatures" (*belles lettres*—and thus today's fiction) are a European invention of the eighteenth century. Etymologically, literature is what is "written" (Latin *letterae*, the letters). And so the pre-modern European notion of literature tended less toward some kind of "aestheticism," but rather to erudition or "learning"; that is, its object was the comprehensive knowledge of the written tradition. Regarding this conceptual history,

there is already a parallel to a Chinese notion of literature: apart from the fact that we have here—in contrast to the European development—not the epic and drama, but the poem at the forefront of literature, we also have, with the important Chinese term *wen* 文, "writing, literature"—an equivalent of the pre-modern European concept of literature.

Regarding a pre-modern understanding of literature in China, two distinctly Chinese peculiarities have to be considered: the language and script, as well as the role of literati-officials as guardians of a cultural tradition based on writing. As is well known, Chinese is an isolating, non-inflecting and tonal language, of which the smallest units of meaning (morphemes) are pronounced with one syllable and are intonated (in modern standard Chinese) in four different ways: the so-called four tones. In writing, these smallest units of meaning are the characters. Texts in classical Chinese literary language—which is different from modern spoken Chinese, but which was, until the beginning of the twentieth century, the established literary expression—are characterized by economy of expression. A character marks usually a word which cannot be inflected (though it is often endowed with a dazzling variety of meanings). There are no articles; pronouns as well as conjunctions all can largely be dispensed with. Often there is no difference between nominal, adjectival and verbal use of the words. With these features, the ancient texts sometimes possess a remarkable semantic openness, which allows for interpretation and entails an aesthetically effective suggestive potential.

Although, over the centuries, the Chinese written language (*wenyan* 文言) absorbed the input of contemporary colloquialisms, it still represents its own idiom to be understood purely as writing. Like all the languages of the world, the spoken language of the Chinese people has altered a lot throughout history, thus also the pronunciation of Chinese characters. But what is remarkable in the Chinese written language is the fact that the change in pronunciation does not adversely affect the understanding of ancient texts (unlike Old or Middle High German or Old French and Old English). People read the ancient writings with the contemporary pronunciation, with the result that, for example in poetry, sometimes the rhymes don't quite agree, but this does not distract from the understanding of the writing. This adaptability of ancient Chinese texts to contemporary reading also guaranteed the durability of the classical canon. And since the grammar, as it were, is embedded in these texts, it was always possible to write essays according to classical patterns found in the ancient texts.

Two features deserve more mention: the popularity of parallelisms and allusions. Due to the base of syllable-sense units in the form of characters, it is easy to have arrangements of sentences—or lines of poetry—with the same line length and number of characters per line; that is, as pairings of two parallel lines. Each character of a line—as a single syllable and word—can thus find its counterpart in the other, whereby the correspondences are usually carried out according to semantic fields. This parallelism *membrorum*, especially the antithetical parallelism (*duizhang* 对仗), became one of the most characteristic features of Chinese poetry and prose. Of course, other languages and cultural traditions, such as ours, also know parallelism as a rhetorical device, but due to linguistic structures the possibilities are in no way comparable with the Chinese.[2] This goes so far that some classical texts with their notorious semantic openness and indeterminacy can only be understood and translated after considering the parallel structures.[3] The parallel arrangements eventually also helped the Chinese literati with the memorization of entire text corpuses.

Since the literati were acquainted with the entire literary tradition, they loved to allude to these texts by way of quotations (sometimes slightly altered)—and since their literary colleagues were no less well read, they didn't fear not being understood. Rather, these allusions lend an additional attraction to their texts. There were even schools of poetry in which the skillful manipulation of allusions was elevated to a great art.[4] Thus, the texts had a remarkable feature which only in the post-modern era has gained importance; namely, a high degree of intertextuality.

In addition, the Chinese writing has a pictorial dimension. Although it is strictly speaking not pictorial writing (the vast majority of Chinese characters are organized not according to pictorial, but to phonetic principles), it has, just from its origins, a very pictorial and also symbolic component which is still reflected in many characters: the pictograms. In this respect, we find ingrained in Chinese writing an imagery that further takes shape as figurative and poetic expression in literature, especially in poetry.

The Chinese *Literatus*

The ability to use the written language distinguished the members of the cultural and political elite in China. In this respect, we have a close relationship between literary education and political power, based on writing. The pre-modern Confucian literati (*wenren* 文人, "men of literature"), as specialists in canonical texts of the past, were writers and officials who, in

order to attain their civil servant status, had to prove themselves through an elaborate examination system to be primarily connoisseurs of their written tradition. The themes of examinations, which had existed since the beginning of the seventh century AD, were the classical writings of the Confucian tradition. Essays had to be written around these texts (from the Ming period on; i.e., from about the fourteenth/fifteenth century), in the meticulously regulated form of the "Eight-legged essay" (*baguwen* 八股文)[5]; hence the candidates knew this entire canon (more than 400,000 characters) by heart. As a collection of songs from the first millennium BC was among the classics—the canonical *Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 诗经)—literature, in the strict sense, was already an examination topic. The demands increased when in the eighth century (Tang Dynasty) the writing of poetry was required for the examinations. In order to master this part of their exams too, the literati were familiar with the poetic œuvres of all great poets; in other words, they knew them by heart. This phenomenal memory performance as a necessity for exam preparation explains the stupendous erudition of pre-modern Chinese literati.

Writing and Literature (*wen*) as a Cultural Tradition

The literati-officials were thus, as it were, the guardians of a literacy-based cultural tradition. The character *wen*, which stands for this kind of literacy, therefore has to be examined first for a Chinese concept of literature, particularly because it stands, in the modern combinations *wenxue* 文学 (literally "learning of writing") or *wenzhang* 文章 ("literary work"), for "literature" in a narrower sense.[6] *Wen* has the original meaning "pattern" (crossed lines). In the classical Zhou period (eleventh to third centuries BC), this meant mainly "design" and "rhetorical ornaments"—that is, "beautiful exterior" as opposed to "substance" or "inner essence" (*zhi* 质). Derived from this, *wen* was also used later in a general sense as "formally crafted literature" in contrast to "everyday prose" (*bi* 笔).[7] Another important sense of *wen* is "civil," "civilizing" or "cultivating" (as opposed to "martial," *wu* 武), which even resonates today in the common term for "culture" (*wenhua* 文化). The character w*en*, therefore, entails an aesthetic ("beautiful figure"), but also an educational, cultivating aspect. It was used only from the late Han period on (first to second centuries AD) in the sense of "literature." This initially involved the major canonical

works, namely the Confucian classics (*jing* 经), the writings of the philosophical schools (*zi* 子) of the late Zhou period (sixth to third centuries BC), historiography (*shi* 史) from the early Han period on (second century BC) and collections of poetry (*ji* 集).[8]

The importance of *wen* in early Chinese thought might be fathomed from its treatment in a work that, as a comprehensive reflection on various aspects of literature, stands unique in the history of Chinese literature: *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wenxin Diaolong* 文心雕龙) by Liu Xie 刘勰 (c. 465–c. 522/539). In the first chapter, "On the Origin, the *Dao*" (*Yuan dao* 原道), Liu Xie discusses the origin of literature in a cosmological sense. Here, he plays with the various meanings of the character *wen* (as pattern/shape, culture/civilization and literature) and comes up with the following analogy. On the one hand, *wen* (understood as pattern) is the patterned form of nature; thus he considers the celestial bodies, the sun, moon and stars, as well as the forms of the earth, namely mountains and waters, as a "pattern of *Dao*" (*dao zhi wen* 道之文). On the other hand, *wen* is the human mind (*xin* 心) which takes shape in the form of literary patterns. Nature works entirely "by itself" (*ziran* 自然) and thus represents itself in perfect forms, for example in the clouds in the sky or the flowers on earth. These visible forms he calls "signs" (*zhang* 章). There are also audible patterns, such as when a stream flows over rocks, which he again calls *wen* 文. (The basis of this play of words is related to a Chinese word for literature: the composite word *wenzhang* 文章—as a combination of visible and audible patterns—was and still is a common Chinese term for literary works.) Now, he asks, if the natural things that have no consciousness represent themselves in such a perfect shape, how could the creature which is provided with spirit (*xin*)—man—not also have its own forms of expression? So in this first chapter, Liu presents the thesis that literature (*wen*) is the ordered pattern (*wen*) of the human spirit, mediated by language: "With the emergence of mind, language is created, and when language is created, writing appears."[9] Ultimately, however, he understands *wen* in an even broader sense, namely in its third meaning as cultivating: the "teachings of the sages of antiquity" which help give shape to human society, in particular the teachings of Confucius. So he says: "Dao 道 is handed down in writing [wen] through sages, and […] sages make Dao manifest in their writings."[10]

Thus we have a grand analogy, comprising the universe, man and the sages of antiquity, yet also a sublimation of *wen* as the highest organizing principle of the universe and of man. Literature, or rather *wen*, in all its

manifestations and meanings, is nothing less than the visible manifestation of a cosmic organizing principle which, for Liu Xie, reveals itself in the Confucian classics. Therefore, it is said at the beginning of the chapter: "*Wen*, or pattern, is a very great virtue [*de* 德] indeed. It is born together with Heaven and Earth."[11]

Early Chinese Poetry

What was regarded as literature in a narrower sense in the pre-Han period? Epics and tragedies as in ancient Greece did not exist in ancient China (and also not later); the most important literary medium was rather lyric poetry as it was known in the form of the *shi*-poem 诗from the tenth to the seventh or sixth centuries BC, found in the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 诗经), the latter canonized as a classic in the Han period. The early Chinese reflection on literature (and, almost exclusively also, the later) has therefore to be considered in relation to *shi*-poetry.

The earliest *shi*-poems in this classic *Book of Songs* already possess many characteristics of what we perceive as typical Chinese poetry. They thus were to the highest degree formative for style and genre. As regards their basic principles of form, style and content, the characteristics of these poems—especially those of the first and most important group in the *Book of Songs*, called "Folk Songs of the States" (*Guofeng* 国风)—can be summarized as follows:

- The shape of the poems is clearly structured and usually patterned with alternating rhyme; the lines usually have four characters per line and the stanzas consist of four or six lines.
- Often one can find phonetic means such as doublings of adjectives, alliteration or onomatopoeia.
- In terms of content, we find service to the prince and to the ancestors, family life and the obligations therein, as well as festivals and customs.
- Stylistically, the poems already show characteristics that are crucial to the whole history of Chinese poetry; that is, a type of brief and metaphorically suggestive expression—something is being said beyond the actual wording of the text (*yan wai* 言外).

A programmatic "Great Preface" (*shidaxu* 诗大序) existed for this classic of poetry since the Han period; it can be understood as the first text of

literary theory in China.[12] From this preface it becomes clear that, at this early stage, poetry was seen primarily as a verbalization of moral and political disposition (*zhi* 志). This understanding changed from the third to fourth centuries AD on, when the call for expression of feelings (*qing* 情) as the purpose of poetry came to the fore. Also to be found in this preface is a remarkable statement that addresses the close relationship between literature and politics in China: the rulers used songs/poems to educate the people politically and morally; conversely, the songs of the people were used to criticize those in power. When this criticism was indirect and veiled, then the critics could not be blamed.

The *shi*-poem, however, is only one—albeit important—part of the entire corpus of *wen*, understood as literature in a broad sense. If we proceed historically (and if we disregard prose works such as the classics, the writings of the schools of philosophy, the history books etc.), there was a major innovation in roughly the fourth to third centuries BC in the form of a new genre, namely the so-called "Songs of Chu" (*Chuci* 楚辞).[13] In contrast to the *shi*-poems that belong regionally to Northern China, these new songs coming from the South seem far freer and looser, that is, rhythmically varied; they are also less strictly strophic in structure, but often very long. The center piece, *Lisao* 离骚 (Encounter with Suffering), is at more than 370 lines the longest major poem in Chinese literary history. In terms of tone, the *Chuci* are melodic and often elegiac (hence the popular translation of their collective title as "Elegies of Chu" in Western languages). Also, we encounter a different world of symbolism of flowers and plants, of myths, gods and spirits, that can hardly be understood any more today, if at all, and that does not belong to the mainstream of China's cultural history, because of its local shamanistic background. Ultimately, what we have here is not the expression of humans as social beings, but the complex emotional world of man as an individual, for the *Songs of Chu* is a collection of songs that was written in part by one particular person, namely Qu Yuan 屈原 (at least in the case of *Lisao*). Other parts of this collection revolve around him and his fate, and this is the issue of a fair but misjudged official, packaged in shamanistic imagery associated with magical journeys. With Qu Yuan (c. 340–c. 278 BC), there occurs thus for the first time a person as a poet, whose fate was known or rather reflected in his poetry, and with whom one could identify.

In terms of literature, the ensuing Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) also brought about a number of innovations. The historically most important genre among them is the "poetic description," also called "rhymed prose"

or "rhapsody" (*fu* 赋). On the one hand, these rhapsodies of the Han period are in the tradition of the *Songs of Chu*; on the other hand, they have their own character, in both design and content. Regarding content and purpose, most of them possess a strong moralizing, didactic character.[14] Stylistically, they are constructed in parallel verses in terms of number of syllables as well as syntactic and conceptual structure; in addition, they are known for their length and impersonal linguistic virtuosity.

The *Yuefu* 乐府 ballads were another new genre. These were common folksongs among the people, partly collected by an imperial music office (*Yuefu*), but partly also created by officials of this office as, for example, new songs were required for sacrificial rituals. They were short in style, expressive and, as songs, were more of a lyrical character, hence quite different from the *fu*. And they often had a refrain and were—in clear contrast to the *shi*-poems—irregular in structure. They would become a popular literary genre for writers of later periods.

The Standing of Poetry in the Tang and Song Periods

During the Tang Dynasty (seventh to tenth centuries), poetry gained further in status. Especially the regulated poem (*lüshi* 律诗), which is characterized by strict requirements for its formal design, became popular. The number of lines is restricted to eight, the characters per line to five or seven (with a caesura after the second or fourth character). Characters may not appear twice; grammatical auxiliary words, so-called empty characters, are to be avoided. Rhyme is mandatory. Antithetical parallelism is required for the third and fourth as well as for the fifth and sixth lines. Finally, each character must follow a scheme of alternating even (*ping* 平) and uneven (*ze* 仄) tones. Through an elaborate system of compensation, violations against this scheme in one line can be balanced by corresponding changes in another. In this way, there is a regular, but musically varied, sequence of words.[15] The regulated poem, in which these features can be found, was the most modern at that time—hence it was called "poem in the new style" (*jin ti shi* 近体诗); it has been preserved as a popular form down to our modern times.

In spite of the many rules and prohibitions, the great poets of the Tang Dynasty moved in this new form naturally and freely, as if there were no restrictions for them at all. In particular, Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) became

the champion of the regulated poem. Li Bai 李白 (699–762, also known as Li T'ai-po 李太白), preferred less strict forms, such as the popular "poem in the old style" (*gu ti shi* 古体诗). These two poets are also representative of two different standpoints and world views: Du Fu is the poet who is oriented toward Confucianism. He cares about the plight of the people and the fate of the country (*you guo you min* 忧国忧民); his regulated poems served for posterity as a storehouse from which one could derive rules and learn to write poetry. Li Bai, however, is the untrammeled Daoist artist genius who can only be admired, for the naturalness of his works is inimitable. Due to these outstanding poets as well as others, throughout Chinese literary history, poetry was mostly read and appreciated as a reflection of the personality of the poet; that is, of a cultivated or fascinating character. Hence, there is a timelessly valid dictum: "Poetry is like the man" (*shi ru qi ren* 诗如其人).[16] Through the works of these and other poets of the Tang Dynasty, poetry now rose to become a new aesthetic paradigm. Even more than the Confucian classics or the canonical histories, it became formative and, as it were, a cultural institution. Poetry became the epitome of literature and of cultural refinement.

From the Tang period on, we encounter new forms in the realm of poetry, most of all the so-called *ci*-song 词, which came from Central Asia and was practiced as a way of entertainment in the singing girls' milieu of the capital. Due to this origin, the contents of the *ci*-song at first had the reputation of being "unserious." In terms of form, the c*i* is close to the *yuefu* ballads, because, unlike the strictly regulated length of line in the *shi*-poems, the *ci*-song has verses and lines of different lengths. Since the original tunes were already lost in the Song Dynasty (tenth to thirteenth centuries), what was handed down in later times was only the formal framework; that is, the lengths of lines and verses as well as the tone pattern, called "melody" (*cipai* 词牌), which was mentioned in publications along with the title of the song. Several hundreds of such "melodies" existed, the features of which were kept in respective manuals. The *ci*-song would come to bloom in the Song Dynasty (following the Tang), but it is also cherished as a literary medium till today.

The Song Dynasty was a period of high urban civilization and belongs to the great epochs of Chinese culture. The major poet-literatus of the Song period was Su Shi 苏轼 (Su Dongpo 苏东坡, 1037–1101), one of the most prolific and influential literati in Chinese history in general. He not only opened up the field of *ci*-poetry, beyond the content of love with singing girls and such, to include philosophical or existential themes; he

also exceeded in all genres of poetry and prose, and was known as an expert calligrapher and painter, apart from being a high official. Other major poets were Mei Yaochen 梅尧臣 (1002–1060), Xin Qiji 辛弃疾 (1140–1207) and Lu You 陆游 (1125–1209), as well as the best-known Chinese female poet, Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084–1151).

Fictional Literature and Drama (Opera)

It goes without saying that a wealth of literature going beyond this narrow scope of poetry and philosophical prose (*wen*) can also be found in China, such as narrative prose (in the written classical and in colloquial language), drama, Buddhist and Daoist literature and more. I shall only briefly address fictional prose and drama. Already during the period between the Han and Tang Dynasties (third to seventh centuries), there were stories in the style of "records about the unusual" (*zhiguai* 志怪).[17] This early narrative literature in the classical language (usually very short) was significantly influenced by established historiography. Such works emerged mostly as a kind of "unofficial history" (*waishi* 外史); therefore, they possess from their construction many features of historical records. Generally speaking, we can notice in China a close relationship between fictional prose and historiography, the latter being one of the major components of classical Chinese literacy. These fictional stories written in the classical language experienced an upswing in the Tang Dynasty as what were termed "transmissions of curiosities" (*chuanqi* 传奇).

From the Song period on, and especially in the Ming period (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries), there was a flourishing of urban culture; accordingly, we find accompanying innovations in the field of literature, namely in fiction: colloquial novels and collections of short stories (*huaben* 话本 and *pinghua* 平话) developed, the latter mainly due to the work of Feng Menglong (1574–1645) as a collector and author. The Ming Dynasty brought forth four great novels (*xiaoshuo* 小说),[18] but not only is their authorship in some cases unknown or disputed, their literary value was at that time only marginally an object of aesthetic considerations and discussions.[19] One must also note that, despite the classification of these novels (today known as "Chapter Novels" *zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小说) as works in the colloquial language, the diction is still a mixture of vernacular and classical (also due to the frequent insertion of poems). Hence, without a basic knowledge of classical Chinese, these "colloquial" works cannot be understood. At that time, due to their "lower" status and linguistic

quality, they did not receive much acknowledgment (one often recognizes the tradition of storytellers by stereotyped phrases such as, at the end of a chapter, "If you want to know what happens next, you have to read the next chapter"). Today, however, these novels are being celebrated as milestones of an autochthonous narrative literary tradition.

In the subsequent Qing period (seventeenth to twentieth centuries), we have the most valued of all the novels of pre-modern China, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hongloumeng* 红楼梦) by Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (1715–1763). This work has become highly significant not only because of the skillful psychological characterization of the countless characters, but also, and especially, because the whole aesthetic sensibilities of the educated class are reflected in this work.[20] In addition, the book contains numerous poems and a wealth of veiled puns, often hidden in names, and thus usually revealed only through repeated readings of the book. Ideologically, the book combines Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist views on life, while the accent is definitely on the latter, namely through the skillful device of revealing the illusory (empty, *kong* 空) nature of life by means of the plenteous description of its fullness (i.e., its lusts, *se* 色). Since the book is full of magic, it stands also in the tradition of the "transmissions of curiosities." In any case, one characteristic of Chinese fiction is (in stark contrast to the European tradition, tending toward realism) that the supernatural (and the incredible coincidence) plays a most important role.

The same applies to drama (*zaju* 杂剧), which emerged in the Mongol period (Yuan Dynasty, thirteenth to fourteenth centuries).[21] Although the term "drama" is established, more rightly it should be called "opera," as it was always sung. Here we also find content (e.g., heroic tales) that has been recorded in the history books. Important for the understanding of the Chinese drama, however, is the wealth of sophisticated forms and rules. In its heyday (the Yuan Dynasty), there were—similar to the regulated poem—a plethora of rules that had to be observed, so that the enjoyment of theater at that time could not have been something for everyone. Today it is assumed that this abundance of rules had the consequence that the theater of the Yuan period did not survive in its original form. In the subsequent Ming Dynasty, simpler forms emerged, mainly in Southern China. The Peking Opera (*jingju* 京剧) of today has preserved many elements from the original drama/opera.

It is important to note, however, that stories, novels and drama were, up to modern times, not considered as high literature; there were only isolated attempts to upgrade this "lower" tradition, such as those under-

taken by the unorthodox literatus Li Zhi 李贽 (1527–1602) at the end of the Ming Dynasty, and also by Jin Shengtan 金圣叹 (1610–1661) at the beginning of the Qing period.[22] It is exactly the failure of such attempts that illustrates, nevertheless, how firmly established the tradition was, especially its preference for the *shi*-poem and classical prose. Only modernity has brought about a change, which was accompanied also by an appreciation of unorthodox figures such as Li Zhi.

The Understanding of Literature in Chinese Modernity

A paradigm shift occurred in modern China, less so through the revolution of 1911 (with the abolition of the Empire and the establishment of the Republic of China), but rather through the so-called May Fourth Movement 五四运动 of 1919 (actually a movement for a new culture which lasted between 1915 and 1923). Chinese intellectuals were alarmed by the continuing blows received from the imperialist and colonialist European powers in China. Taking traditional Confucian society as the main culprit—including its literary preferences—Confucianism and its traditional social order were consequently thrown on the garbage pile of history. Instead, European doctrines of all kinds became popular, especially Marxism after the October Revolution in Russia. During the May Fourth Movement, first the classical literary language was subjected to criticism and abolished as a literary idiom in favor of the vernacular; then traditional literature was re-evaluated, whereby the traditional order was turned upside down: everything colloquial and fictional was considered to be superior. The pre-modern Chinese "chapter novel," however, with its schematic structure did not stand the test of comparison with the newly discovered realistic novel translated from European languages (except for "The Dream of the Red Chamber"). The Western import model was thought to be far superior and was, in addition, understood as an engine of social change; hence it became the new standard of literature. A similar innovation is represented by the spoken drama, which had not previously existed in this form in China and which was also imported from Europe. One could thus characterize the paradigm shift of the early twentieth century as follows: a literary sensibility trained on poetic criteria was now orienting itself toward the novel, the short story and the drama, which, in fact, were foreign literary imports; and hence, we have now a Western foreign (or modern or universal?) standard of literature in China.

A further characteristic of the modern Chinese understanding of literature is a feature that is already prefigured in the traditional connection between literature and Confucian doctrine; that is, a close relationship between literature and politics. Beginning with the May Fourth Movement, literature should serve primarily the purpose of criticizing political and social conditions and, accordingly, promote social change. This development was intensified by the actions of the colonial powers in China, especially Japan (in imitation of European imperialism), and by the repressive politics of the Guomindang government under Chiang Kai-shek against the Communists. In the 1930s, a "league of left writers" was formed (led by Lu Xun 鲁迅, 1881–1936, the most important writer of modern China), which dominated the literary scene despite the persecution of its members by the Guomindang government. In the areas controlled by the Communists (Yan'an), however, Mao Zedong convened a "Forum on Literature and Art" 在延安文艺座谈会 in 1942, which put a tighter rein on literature than the Guomindang government ever attempted. According to Mao, literature hereafter should—in the sense advocated by Lenin—serve as a "cog and screw" in the "revolutionary machinery." As these views became the new orthodoxy with the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, literature was henceforth a handmaid of politics.

It is indicative of the relationship between literature and politics in the 65-year history of the People's Republic of China that a critique campaigning against a Peking Opera in the traditional form, written in 1965 by Wu Han and focusing on a historical figure from the Ming period, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* (*Hai Rui ba guan* 海瑞罢官),[23] formed the prelude to the biggest catastrophe of modern China: the Cultural Revolution. After its end and the death of Mao in 1976, literature in the strict sense began to gain form again, with a focus on the wounds the Cultural Revolution had brought about and by trying again, as previously in the May Fourth Movement, to tie standards to Western knowledge and Western literary developments. Meanwhile, from modernism through "magical realism" (à la Márquez) to post-modernism (including post-structuralism and post-colonialism, and much more), almost everything Western has been received, but a specific Chinese understanding of literature remains to be formulated and seen. Recent trends show a mixed picture. On the one hand, the impression prevails that one wants to catch up with and adjust to the lower standards of literature in the West. Thus, young (often female) writers, such as Wei Hui 卫慧 (*1973) and Mian Mian 棉棉 (*1970), demand in their novels, as it were, sex, drugs and rock

'n' roll as universal achievements also for China; or, in other words, here literature is primarily understood as a break with traditional taboos and thus seen under the aspect of becoming bestsellers—while their authors (who have already become well known in the West) are being touted at the same time by their Western publishers as the "voice of young China."[24]

On the other hand, a writer such as the Nobel Laureate of 2000, Gao Xingjian 高行健 (*1940), who is now living in France (and is politically ostracized in his home country), tries to explore the traditional Chinese culture in disappearance, for example in his book *Soul Mountain* (*Lingshan* 灵山), a fascinating hybrid of traditional travelogue and Western stream-of-consciousness novel featuring a frame of mind derived from Zen Buddhism—while at the same time keeping a completely apolitical stance. Poetry, as the central form in pre-modern China, has also regained in format, thus by poets like Bei Dao 北岛 (*1949), Yang Lian 杨炼 (*1955) and many others (the two mentioned also now live abroad). Though there might be a few variances from modern Western poetry, such as the reference to certain traditional elements, the differences to Western poetry are hardly perceptible. It seems that modern Chinese poetry has successfully separated from its origin and finally arrived in the West (or Western culture has made it to China). Quite a few of today's intellectuals, however, have maintained the practice of poetry-writing in the classical form of the *shi*-poem. It is a condensed poetry of a special kind which provides, much like the Japanese *haiku*, through its form a rigor and discipline that are considered to be a challenge. Even the authoritative creator of the modern prose poem (and symbolist short stories), the already mentioned Lu Xun, had chosen the form of the *shi*-poem for his most private thoughts and expressions. And none other than Mao Tse-tung himself wrote in the *shi*-form as well as in the style of *ci*-songs, condemned in his time as "feudal" (he prescribed that his people should only write poetry in the vernacular language…). Whether this preference, nevertheless, indicates a concept of literature for all times in China is another question and one that we will not attempt to answer here.

Chinese Literature in the Context of World Literature

Against this backdrop, let us now examine briefly how this complex history of Chinese literature is being represented in a current Western anthology, and if its treatment does justice to a Chinese understanding of literature. As already mentioned, the anthology consulted is *The Norton*

Anthology of World Literature, which is advertised on the publisher's website as "the most-trusted anthology of World Literature available."[25] For this collection, a well-known specialist in Chinese literature was involved: Stephen Owen of Harvard University served on its editorial board.

As the *Norton Anthology* covers religious and philosophical texts from all over the world, Vol. A (Part III: Early Chinese Literature and Thought) also includes extracts of major Chinese philosophical prose works, such as the Confucian *Analects* (*Lunyu* 论语), as well as parts of the Daoist classics *Daodejing* 道德经 and *Zhuangzi* 庄子. In addition, and on a relatively smaller scale, pieces of important historiographical writing, such as by the famous Han Dynasty historian Sima Qian 司马迁 (c. 145–86 BC), are included. In terms of poetry of this period, we find a few poems from the classic *Book of Songs* as well as from the *Songs of Chu*. In a special section on "Speech, Writing, and Poetry," we find the "Great Preface" to the *Book of Songs* as an important early programmatic statement about the relevance of poetry. This coverage, which includes the important philosophical and historiographical (not fictional!) prose (*wen*) as well as poetry, appears comprehensive and plausible for the early period of Chinese thought.

Vol. B (Part III: Medieval Chinese Literature) has sections on "Hermits, Buddhists, and Daoists" and "Tang Poetry," as well as "Literature about Literature." In this part, many important Chinese authors are covered, but specialists on Chinese literature will also encounter some oddities. In the section "Hermits" we find (in this order) three poems from Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263), excerpts from Liu Yiqing's 刘义庆 (403–444) prose work *New Tales from an Account of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu* 世说新语), many poems from the Buddhist poet Hanshan 寒山 (ninth century), as well as representative poems and prose by Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 (or Tao Qian 陶潜, 365–427). In this collection, though, we see how Western predilections determine what is considered to be world literature today. For the Chinese, the Tang Dynasty Buddhist figure Hanshan, of whose life and background little is known, is not recognized as a major poet. Apparently, he was more appreciated in the Zen Buddhist tradition of Japan, from where he was discovered by rebellious American poets in the middle of the twentieth century; that is to say, by the Beat Generation poet Gary Snyder (who was one of his earliest translators into English) as well as by Jack Kerouac, who (on the advice of Snyder) even dedicated his book *The Dharma Bums* (1958) to Hanshan. Thus we have here Western (American) preferences determining the contents of this book—something which should not be surprising, though, considering that we have here an *American* anthology of world literature.

Equally odd is what we find in the section on "Tang Poetry," after all the golden age of Chinese literature. With many poems by four great poets of this period, Wang Wei 王维 (699–759), Li Bai, Du Fu and Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), this age of great poetry is well represented. But then we get shorter prose works by Han Yu 韩愈 (768–824), Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819) and Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831; "The Story of Yingying," *Yingying zhuan* 莺莺传), as well as, finally, again a couple of *ci*-songs, now by the best-known female poet of the Chinese past, Li Qingzhao, who, however, did not live in the Tang but in the Song period. It is of course a must, according to today's Western standards, to cover female authors in such anthologies (although, in terms of reception, they did not play an important role, in fact just as little as female writers did in pre-modern Western history). What is bewildering, though, is that Li Qingzhao is the only representative of the rich epoch of Song Dynasty literature (neither the eminent Su Dongpo, nor Xin Qiji, Lu You nor any other poet of this period is mentioned), and this in a section which is called "Tang Poetry."

The section "Literature about Literature" has excerpts from Cao Pi's 曹丕 (187–226) "Discourse on Literature" (*Dianlun lunwen* 典论论文) and Lu Ji's 陆机 (261–303) "Exposition on Literature" (*Wen fu* 文赋), but then it includes parts of Wang Xizhi's 王羲之 (303–361) "Preface to the Collection of the Orchid Pavilion Poems" (*Lanting xu* 兰亭序), which is rightly famous in Chinese history both for its content and for the calligraphy with which it was written, but not as a piece of writing about literature. What is missing in this section is a reference to the greatest work of Chinese literary criticism of all periods: Liu Xie's *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons.*

We encounter China again in Vol. C (Part III: East Asian Drama). None of the formative dramas of the Yuan Dynasty, however, is included here, only excerpts of *The Peach Blossom Fan* (*Taohua shan* 桃花扇) by Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648–1718) of the Qing period. Vol. D (Part II: Early Modern Chinese Literature) has excerpts from Wu Cheng'en's 吴承恩 (c. 1506–c. 1582) novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyouji* 西游记), one short story by Feng Menglong 冯梦龙(1574–1645), "The Courtesan's Jewel Box" (*Du Shiniang nu chen baiyuxiang* 杜十娘怒沉百宝箱), and parts from Cao Xueqin's famous novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*The Story of the Stone*). Vol. E (Part II: Culture and Empire: Vietnam, India, China) has small parts of Liu E's 刘鹗 (Liu Tieyun 刘铁云, 1857–1909) *Travels of Laocan* (*Laocan youji* 老残游记), a novel from the turn of the nineteenth

to the twentieth century which however, apart from specialists, has not attracted much attention. Finally, we have bits and pieces of China again in Vol. F. Part I (Modernity and Modernism, 1900–1945) has two stories by Lu Xun, "Diary of a Madman" (*Kuangren riji* 狂人日记) and "Medicine" (*Yao* 药), as well as a story each by Lao She 老舍 (1899–1966) and Zhang Ailing (1920–1995) 张爱玲 (Eileen Chang). Part II (Postwar and Postcolonial Literature: 1945–1968) has in the sub-section "Manifestos" Chen Duxiu's 陈独秀 (1879–1942) article "On Literary Revolution" (*Wenxue geming lun* 文学革命论), which had appeared, however, already in 1917. And as a last entry in Part III (Contemporary World Literature) we find "The Old Gun" (*Laoqiang baodao* 老枪宝刀) by Mo Yan 莫言 (*1955), the 2012 Nobel Laureate of Literature.

The questions arise: Is this coverage adequate? Are masterpieces, according to a Chinese standard, well represented? And is the collection representative of a Chinese understanding (or concept) of literature? The answer would be a definitive yes and no. It is clear that an anthology like this has to make difficult choices. In focusing in the first volumes on classical prose (*wen*) and poetry—from antiquity (*Book of Songs*, *Songs of Chu*) to the great poets of later times, Ruan Ji and Tao Yuanming, as well as to four great Tang poets—the collection gives justice to the great achievement of classical Chinese literature, in the form of both prose and poetry. That the rich and innovative poetry of the Song Dynasty (also its new genre, the *ci*-song) is only treated marginally with the inclusion of a few poems by Li Qingzhao, dismissing a towering figure such as Su Dongpo, is not an adequate representation of Chinese literature, nevertheless. It could be compared with, for example, leaving out Goethe when trying to present an overview of German literature.

The later parts of Chinese literature included in the anthology are only novels, short stories and drama, thus illustrating a relatively late Chinese literary preference: the new concept formed at the beginning of the twentieth century around the May Fourth Movement, which in fact is an adoption of Western standards.

And here we may return again to the defining Western understanding of literature as fiction; that is, novels and drama. Although disputed, this view still appears to be dominant among critics and comparatists. After all, this understanding was already formative when Goethe initially coined the idea of world literature. Goethe appears to have been very much interested in China; for example, during the years 1813–1816, he read everything that he could find about China in the library of Weimar. He was even acquainted with the

intricacies of the Chinese language and writing system (through the help of the Sinologist Julius von Klaproth; in fact, he was proud to be able to demonstrate Chinese writing to the princesses in Weimar). But Goethe, unfortunately, knew very little about Chinese literature.[26] He had read Du Halde's standard *Description…de la Chine*,[27] which included a few poems from the *Book of Songs*, but most influential in Du Halde's book was the translation of the play "The Orphan of Zhao" (*Zhao shi gu er* 赵氏孤儿). It was a time when in Europe the theater (tragedies and comedies) dominated the literary scene; it was also the height of the epoch of Chinoiserie. Not surprisingly, the translated play soon became common knowledge to Europeans, was retranslated by Voltaire, and we find its plot structure reappearing in Goethe's "Elpenor" fragment. Apart from this Chinese drama, considered by the Chinese as literature of a lower standard, Goethe read a few novels and stories, likewise not literature of a high standard for the Chinese of his time; he even (erroneously) assumed that the Chinese exceeded the Europeans in writing such novels. The content of these stories opened up for him the world of Confucian morality, modesty and good manners, something that he very much appreciated in his old age. (Daoism and Buddhism remained unknown to him.) It was at this point—the period of his latest preoccupation with China in the years 1824–1827 and his reading of Chinese novels—that Goethe formulated his famous idea of "world literature."

As to poetry, the most esteemed sort of literature and that which reached the highest standing in China, he hardly knew anything of a substantial nature. Apart from a few songs from the *Book of Songs*, he was acquainted with a collection of poems describing beautiful women of the Chinese past, translated by the Englishman Peter Perring Thoms (*Chinese Courtship*), which he read at the age of 75 in a—probably very stimulating—English–Chinese bilingual edition and of which he retranslated four songs. Considering that this limited encounter inspired him also to his late collection of "The Chinese-German Book of Seasons and Hours" ("Chinesisch-deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten," 1829) in which we find some of the intricacies of Chinese poetry at work, we get an inkling that Goethe might have even grasped some of the essence of Chinese poetry, such as the concentration on one scene, the sparseness of expression and the fusion of feelings (*qing* 情) with scenery (*jing* 景).

But he never read the truly great poets of China, Du Fu, Li Bai, Wang Wei or Su Dongpo. Bearing in mind, though, that in 1814 he discovered Persian poetry—that is, in the person of the poet Hafez (c. 1325–c. 1390), an encounter which inspired him to one of his major poetic works, the

West-Eastern Diwan—one can only deplore that he lacked a better acquaintance with Chinese poetry. What heights might have been reached had he been able to read, let's say, Du Fu or Li Bai? But such is history. We can only fancy what would have come out of, for example, an encounter and discussion of Socrates and Confucius—an imagined meeting of minds which, after all, inspired François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon (1651–1715) to one of his famous *Dialogues of the Dead*.[28]

The place of poetry in a concept of world literature is a very special one. Different from fiction, a true appreciation of poetry in translation is not possible. Too much of its fascination depends on the respective form, and this is especially so in the case of Chinese poetry, where we not only have a written language which is incomparable to European languages, but also a wealth of formal features unknown in any other national poetry. Hence it is rightly said that "poetry gets lost in translation."[29] The Chinese appreciated and excelled in this form of literature to such an extent that they regarded any other form as a far lower standard. But when we read it in translation, we can only appreciate it as adaptations; that is, as summaries of its content. And yet, in spite of this limitation, the reading of Chinese poetry in translation must have exerted quite a fascination on the Western reader—as it did with Goethe and as it still does today. We might fathom its allure to European readers from the great symphonic work *The Song of the Earth* (*Das Lied von der Erde*) by Gustav Mahler, to which he was stirred by reading poor adaptations of six poems of the Tang period (by Li Bai, Wang Wei and others). Although the German translations that are the basis for Mahler's work are gross distortions of the originals, they inspired him to one of his most sublime works. If the reading of poetry even in inadequate translations and adaptations still can lead to such a meeting of minds and creative outbursts, then we can truly lament the fact that Goethe never got a chance to read Li Bai or Du Fu.

References

1. Ahmed Baba Miské, *Lettre ouverte aux elites du Tiers-Monde*, Paris: Minerve, 1981, p. 143.
2. The predilection for parallel structures is also prefigured through the dominance of the correlative *Yin–Yang* thought. That is, everything belongs to either one of these dual cosmic forces; and universal harmony is achieved only through a balancing or matching of the two.

3. Joachim Gentz, “Zum Parallelismus in der chinesischen Literatur”, in: Andreas Wagner (Ed.): *Parallelismus Membrorum*. Fribourg, Göttingen 2007, pp. 241–269.
4. Such as the Jiangxi 江西 school of poetry around Huang Tingjian 黄庭坚 (1045–1105).
5. Ching-I Tu, “The Chinese Examination Essay: Some Literary Considerations”, in: *Monumenta Serica 31* (1974–75), p. 404.
6. The complex history of *wenzhang* is investigated in detail in Martin Kern’s well-researched article “Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon. Historical Transitions of Wen in Early China”, in: *T’oung Pao* 87 (2001), pp. 43–91.
7. Pauline Yu, “Formal Distinctions in Chinese Literary Theory”, in: Susan Bush / Christian Murck (Eds.): *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton 1985, pp. 27–56.
8. These groups form the four different sections of the traditional Chinese library (*sibu* 四部 or *siku* 四库).
9. 心生而言立,言立而文明. Vincent Yu-chung Shih (Transl.), *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons (bilingual edition)*, Hong Kong: Chinese UP 1983, p. 13.
10. 道沿圣以垂文, 圣因文而明道. Shih, *Literary Mind*, p. 19.
11. 文之为德而大矣, 与天地並生者何哉. *Ibid*., p. 13.
12. Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1992, p. 49. Siu-kit Wong (Ed.), *Early Chinese Literary Criticism*. Hong Kong 1983.
13. David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985.
14. David Knechtges, The Han Rhapsody. *A Study of the fu of Yang Hsiung*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976; Burton Watson, *Chinese Rhyme-Prose*, New York: Columbia UP 1971.
15. Karl-Heinz Pohl, *Ästhetik und Literaturtheorie in China,* München: Saur, 2007, p. 151ff.
16. *Ibid*., p. 10.
17. Robert E. Hegel, “Traditional Chinese Fiction – The State of the Field”, in: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53/2 (1994), pp. 394–426.
18. 吴承恩:《西游记》Wu Cheng’en (c. 1506 – c. 1582): *Xiyou ji* (*The Journey to the West*); 罗贯中:《三国演义》Luo Guanzhong (c. 1330–1400), *Sanguo yanyi* (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*);《金瓶梅》*Jin ping mei* (*The Golden Lotus*); 施耐庵:《水浒传》Shi Nai’an (ca. 1296–1372), *Shuihu zhuan* (*Water Margin*). See C.T. Hsia, *The Classical Chinese Novel*, New York, Columbia UP, 1968.
19. David L. Rolston (Ed.), *How to Read the Chinese Novel*. Princeton 1990.

20. Its alternative title is *The Story of the Stone*. Cao, Xueqin, *The Story of the Stone. A Chinese Novel.* 5 Vols., Transl. David Hawkes and John Minford. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973–1987.
21. Stephen H. West, "Drama", in: Nienhauser, William H. (Ed.), *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*. Vol. 1. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986, pp. 13–30.
22. Rolston, *How to Read the Chinese Novel.*
23. The play by Wu Han used the established device of criticizing the present (Mao's dismissal of Peng Dehuai) through the past (Hai Rui's dismissal).
24. This led Wolfgang Kubin, Professor of Chinese Literature at Bonn University, to his much-debated remark: "All modern Chinese literature is rubbish!" For the reaction, see Didi Kirsten Tatlow, "Ties That Blind", in: *South China Morning Post*, 21.01.2007, p. 5; http://www.scmp.com/article/579045/ties-blind.
25. Here is a table of contents: http://media.wwnorton.com/cms/contents/NAWOL_TOC_new.pdf.
26. For an overview, see Katharina Mommsen, "Goethe und China in ihren Wechselbeziehungen", in Günther Debon and Adrian Hsia (Eds.), *Goethe und China – China und Goethe*, Bern: Peter Lang, 1985, pp. 15–36; David Damrosch, *What is World Literature*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003, pp. 1–36.
27. The English edition (in 4 vols.) appeared as Jean Baptiste Du Halde, *The General History of China: containing a geographical, historical, chronological, political and physical description of the empire of China, Chinese-Tartary, Corea, and Thibet; including an exact and particular account of their customs, manners, ceremonies, religion, arts and sciences* (3rd ed.), London: J. Watts, 1741. The original edition can be viewed here: http://www.archive.org/stream/generalhistoryof01duha#page/n3/mode/2up.
28. Fénelon, *Dialogues des Morts et Fables, écrits composés pour l'éducation du duc de Bourgogne*, Paris 1700, 1712. In fact, Fénelon's dialogue, siding more with the Greek philosopher, is a critique of contemporary Sinophiles.
29. Stephen Owen, "What is World Poetry – The Anxiety of Global Influence", *The New Republic*, Nov. 12, 1990, p. 28.30.



CHAPTER 14

How to Become World Literature: Chinese Literature's Aspiration and Way to "Step into the World"

Liu Hongtao

1

The debate about world literature is a topical and important debate, especially in the so-called Third World and of course in China, a modern country that saw itself officially as a Third World country not too long ago. We all know that it is also an old debate that reaches back to the time of Goethe. In Goethe's writings and his oral comments on world literature that date back to the period between 1827 and 1830,[1] two main ideas were expressed: (1) world literature is an integral part of the ideal of cosmopolitanism, which would allow the various national literatures to gradually break down their state of separation and instead, by combining their influences, form an organic whole; and (2) world literature is the space

This essay was translated by David Z. Dayton, who is a PhD Candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of California, Davis.

Liu Hongtao (✉)
School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University,
Beijing, China
e-mail: htliu@bnu.edu.cn

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_14

where the intrinsic value of national literatures can be revealed. This is to say that at the moment of the conception of world literature, the idea already contained the values of both cosmopolitanism and localism. These two values are contradictory and yet united, demonstrating global aspirations while also expressing local scenes. In the last 200 years, however, the internal tension formed between these two contradictory yet united values has predicated the vibrancy and appeal of the idea of world literature.

The Goethean concept of world literature experienced a notable reception in China in the first few years of the twentieth century, when it was utilized among scholars as one of the discourses on the global development of Chinese literature. At that time, China had just experienced its transition from a dynastic empire to a modern national republic and both its national and its global awareness were steadily growing, thus laying the groundwork for the conceptions of "Chinese literature" and "world literature." Zhenduo Zheng 郑振铎 was the earliest scholar in China who theorized on world literature systematically. In 1922, he published the article "A View on the Unification of Literature,"[2] in which he argued that although there are differences between literatures arising from locality, nationality, time period, and style, literature's foundation in a universal form of humanity allows it to possess a global unity, which is, precisely, world literature. Although basing the unity of world literature on a universal form of humanity was not unique to Zheng, in view of the backdrop of the May Fourth Movement (1915–1921) this concept of world literature reflected the yearning within China's "New Literature" movement to establish connections with foreign literatures that would grant the elevated vantage point of "humanity," from which scholars could contemplate the direction of the development that national literature might take. In the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, China's concept of world literature experienced two major changes of course, as it first adopted the Soviet concept of world literature and then began to increase the Eastern cultural dimension of world literature.[3]

Profiting from a policy of reform and readiness to open the country to outside influences that characterized the decisive turn we commonly associate with the 1980s, Chinese literature began to revive. It was now that *joining the world* was increasingly seen as an important route towards this revival. In 1985, the collection edited by Xiaoyi Zeng 曾小逸 entitled *Stepping into the World Literature: China's Modern Writers and Foreign Literature* 走向世界文学 – 中国现代作家与外国文学 was published by Hunan People's Publishing House. Reflecting on the last 25 years, the

volume's most important contribution has been its utilization of a phrase made popular during the first wave of China's reformation and opening, 走向世界 ("stepping into the world"), in order to voice the proposition that we must be "stepping into world literature." In the extensive introduction to this volume, Zeng designated four periods of global literary development based on the historical development of the forms of literary exchange and the structural totality: (1) the epoch of the formation of national literatures through the process of exchange among regional and local literatures, marked by internal exchange and independent development; (2) the epoch of the birth of the totality of world literatures through the exchange and convergence of modern national literatures, marked by exchange between national literatures and the commingling of the literatures of the East and the West (or, as one might also say, the global North and the South); (3) the epoch of the development of world literature through the continuing exchange and convergence among national literatures towards their unification within the totality, marked by the process of exchange informing all literary work; and (4) humanity's future epoch of a united world literature.[4]

This discourse evoked by the phrase "stepping into world literature" demonstrates the significant influence exerted by Chinese scholars in the 1980s and 1990s and how they sparked the intense movement in China to enter into the space of world literature. The actual content of the volume edited by Zeng, however, consists of scholarly contributions focused on foreign literary influences on China's modern writers (exerted especially by Western literature, and this to some extent via Japan), such as the influences that had an impact on the writings of Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Ba Jin, Guo Moruo, and so on. With regard to both content and form, Zeng's introduction concluded that there exists *a relationship of dependence* between different types of literature: a literature that apparently is just stepping into world literature can only be a literature that has accepted foreign influence; or, to put it differently, these authors were using foreign "advanced" literature in order to reform the perceived "backwardness" of Chinese literature. After 1949, Chinese literature experienced 17 years of largely unidirectional influence from Soviet "pioneering" literature and then suffered the harmful isolation from the world caused by the 10-year period of the Cultural Revolution. When China re-opened in the 1980s, Chinese literature was forced to break out of its insular drive for self-sufficiency and enter world literature. Learning from, borrowing, and appropriating foreign literature's "advanced" experience was again

described as the necessary path for Chinese literature's development. Scholars discussed and debated the successful aspects of modern Chinese literature, but focused their attention on the immediate problems facing contemporary Chinese literature and, by extension, Chinese society's development.

It was at the beginning of the twenty-first century that Chinese literature's mode of dependence and its exposure to unidirectional influence when establishing links with world literatures began to be called into question. These questions were raised, for example, in Sihe Chen's 陈思和 editor's note written for the special issue "The Global Elements of Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature" of the journal *Comparative Literature in China*. The purpose of the discussion was to attempt to resolve the problem of the decreasing effectiveness of comparative literature's methodologies when researching questions of influence. As Chen pointed out, "In the twentieth century when Chinese literature entered into the cultural framework of the globe, its previous isolated stance was disrupted, as if the cultural waves from the four corners of the earth all at once came crashing down on China's shores. In the face of this flood of influences, the success of earlier methods of researching influence had to fall into a state of stagnancy because these methods remain based on researching the network of cultural exchanges in isolation." Because of this situation, Chen argued that research methods "require deconstruction and subversion."[5]

As postmodernist proponents of a strategy and framework for "deconstruction and subversion," Chen and others pointed to the necessity of substantiating "the prominent position of Chinese literature within literary connections," which asserted itself specifically in "Chinese culture's formation of a unique aesthetic appreciation within its own social movements (including global influences) that has developed in tandem with world culture and has now obtained a synchronous position with it. With its own unique presentation, it has entered into the ranks of world literature and enriched its content. From this position, we see that the former dualistic structure of 'World – China' (as well as influencer – influenced) no longer holds true because China now has equal standing with other nations' literatures and world literature is being constructed in common."[6] Chen defined this commonality as the "essence of globality" and accentuated the view that "the realization of Chinese literature's modern awareness is the key," "in terms of understanding Chinese literature's modernization over the last century," which is linked to its ability to gen-

erate "entirely new forms of understanding." From his perspective, these new conceptions can even help to reformulate "the concept of modernity created by the West in our unconscious minds."[7]

It is undeniable that from today's point of view, the significance of this discussion has already surpassed the scope of a discussion of comparative literature's methodology. China's growing global influence has steadily improved and spurred the nation's increasing confidence. In the 1980s, the concept of "stepping into world literature" cast Chinese literature as somehow deficient, a minor literature, perhaps—or, as some critics wrote, an "orphan" still outside world literatures: a role which defined its stature and quality as well as its dependency. In contrast, the more recently championed discourse on "The Global Elements of Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature" emphasized Chinese literature's subjective position by seeing Chinese literature as an active participant in world literatures—that is to say, as a member of the family of world literatures—while many of the essential elements of literary and, more generally speaking, cultural globality were regarded as features that works of world literature owe to intrinsically localized production and creation. In view of this position, and based on an evaluation of recent works by Chinese authors, it was maintained that Chinese literature has now been placed on an equal footing with the literatures of other cultures, and that it has actually become one of the constituents of world literature.

It was in this context that Beijing Normal University started in 2009 to be actively committed to a number of cultural activities with the support of the Confucius Institute's headquarters. These activities occurred mainly in the context of a "Project of Furthering the Communication of China's Literature Overseas." This entailed, among other things, the founding of the English-language journal *Chinese Literature Today*, the publication of a book series under the series title "Chinese Literature Today," and the holding of international conferences dedicated to questions related to the communication of China's literature overseas. These three activities have been designed and have subsequently been pursued quite intensively as part of the country's strategy to place Chinese literature on the world stage. It is no exaggeration to say that they have received widespread attention from scholars in China and abroad. These kinds of activities and governmentally supported policies could not have been imagined 20 or even 10 years ago. This is a symbol of the current relationship between Chinese literature and world literature: having experienced the developmental modes of "grasping" (*wo na* 我拿) and "possessing" (*wo you* 我),

Chinese literature has now begun to change into the new mode of "contributing" (*wo gei* 我给). This also suggests that Chinese literature has acquired enough confidence to influence other cultures' power, and is working to project this influence by making world literature more "Chinese."

2

When we reflect on the history of the Chinese concept of world literature as debated during the last 100 years, it is almost unavoidable that one becomes aware of the fact that despite significant shifts in the course of time from idealism to realism, from cosmopolitanism to localism, from import to export, that took place in the changing theories pertaining to Chinese literature and its connections with world literatures, it is nonetheless possible to say that "becoming world literature" has been a constant pursuit. The consequent surge of Chinese culture "into the world" and theories of world literature which contrast with ideas current within international academia have formed an intriguing juxtaposition between China and the world. In her book *The World Republic of Letters*, Pascale Casanova described world literature as the *power* of European literature (although the focus of the argumentation is on French literature) to expand uninterruptedly, gradually *dominating* and *assimilating* Asian, African, perhaps also Central and South American, and certainly even US (or, as one more commonly says, American) literature in a process of seeming unification. According to this concept, modern literatures issuing from cultures that appear to undergo so-called belated development are positioned in what are now seen (also by Casanova) as "peripheral areas" of the literary world system. Ironically, the literary texts here produced can only be the products of "Westernization," according to Casanova and many others.[8] Stephen Owen realized the bias implied in the assessment of so-called peripheral literatures, and also the imbalance within the hegemonically acknowledged development of world literature, very early on. In his article "The Anxiety of Global Influence: What Is World Poetry?"[9] he utilized a discussion of the poetry of Bei Dao to reflect on the dominance of the West in the discourse of world literatures and the harm that this causes. In his article "Chinese Literature in the 'World' Literary Economy,"[10] Andrew Jones echoed Owen's point and stated that Goethe's explanation of world literature was steeped in Orientalist rhetoric emanating from imperialism. Therefore, in order to reduce the obstacles to Chinese

literature joining the world, they suggested that scholars should tear down the high walls surrounding the discourse on world literature.

Regardless of whether we agree with the view that there exists a link between Goethe's thoughts about world literature and Western imperialism, the dominant role played by a colonialist and imperialist West in cultural as well as in other matters is of course undeniable. It is equally true that since Goethe's articulation of the concept of world literature, it has consistently been seen as the path of refinement for national literatures and literature's highest level of achievement, while its meaning has been interpreted as a rule by Western pundits widely noted in the cultural sphere, even outside the West. Such claim to Western cultural dominance continues to exist and is actively asserted. It is obvious that in our era of globalization, the creation of myriad literary awards and the institutions which bestow them in the form of prizes, book rankings, literary festivals, scholarly conferences, and book fairs (and especially the Nobel Prize in Literature) brought national literatures squarely into the space of world literature, which was consequently transformed into a competitive arena. This phenomenon has been described by scholars abroad as a kind of "politics of recognition."[11] For a number of reasons, including the fact that the institutions of literary criticism are being perpetually controlled by only a select few, that major award winners selected are even fewer in number, and that the awards granting the highest material benefits are also the awards that grant the greatest fame (while this fame also provides greater publishing opportunities and book sales as well as exponential benefits for the writer), the competition between those longing to gain recognition has become inordinately fierce. The result has been that writers have begun to follow, and have also become trapped in speculation about, the newest trend or direction in literature. Once a type of literature has been determined to receive the highest awards, writers line up to imitate that award-winning writer's style. And as the institution of literary criticism receives the most influential input from the West, it is non-Western writers who most urgently wish to enter into this space of world literature. Idealizing the West has become a nightmare that provides the responsible parties with excuses and the writers with tremendous pressure. This became apparent, for example, when film director Yimou Zhang's 1987 film adaptation of Mo Yan's novel *Red Sorghum* received the Golden Bear award at the Berlin Film Festival, and later on was critiqued in this way. This is why Owen and Jones proposed to tear down the walls constructed around the discourse of world literatures and throw out the previously

established rules of the game. But how can one truly escape from this perpetual dilemma? In practice, the methods that Owen and Jones suggested have not been effective. They did not recognize how deeply embedded *the developmental mode of "stepping into the world"* has become within modern Chinese literature, and could not estimate the intensity of the desire to have the literature of a particular culture displayed in the space of world literature after it had undergone its process of development. In the era of globalization it would, of course, be impossible to again close borders and turn back to self-production, self-consumption, self-promotion, and self-advocacy. Participating in global competition is natural and unavoidable, and countries and literatures follow this same path.

So, I ask, how can Chinese literature become world literature?

Translation is the primary path for national literature to become world literature. David Damrosch has defined world literature as "the elliptical refraction of national literatures" and "writing that gains in translation."[12] The importance of the first definition is that it invokes a public space for world literature. National literatures do not organically become world literature, but must instead refract like a ray of light through the values informed by languages, cultures, time, space, and so on that—as second focal points in this space—let them become ensembles of hybrid and symbiotic literary works. The theory of "elliptical refraction" shows that there is a natural process of contortion and transformation which texts experience in translation, but that this is the necessary cost of transforming a national literature into world literature. And in the end, it will also enhance the original texts. The various translation theories propagated after the 1970s have dealt with the questions of the independence of the translated text from the original and the translated text's value from many perspectives and localities. All of this research derives impulses from world literature's conception and inspiration, and contributes to it in turn. Damrosch's definition can be said to have been similarly derived from translation theory and it has produced a significant contribution to the theory of world literature. The Nobel Prize in Literature recently awarded to Mo Yan further substantiates Damrosch's theory. The appearance of a large number of revisions and changes in Mo Yan's texts, as translated by Howard Goldblatt, has already been accepted as valid by most scholars. If we hold on to the position of the authenticity of the original work, then these translations are only derivatives and secondary to the original. If we view them, however, from the perspective of world literature, the possibilities these translations manifest are not limited to deficits and alterations. They

demonstrate equally the collisions and the dialogue between two cultures. The possibility of grafting and the re-birth of texts in another language hold great potential for Chinese literature.

Yet at the same time, we must recognize that entering the space of world literature through translation includes factors which can limit literature's further development. Elements such as the readers of translations, the market, and so on are ultimately determined by the complex relationships of international politics, economics, and culture, and determine reception. In China there is a massive volume of foreign literature translated every year into Chinese. In comparison, how many Chinese texts are translated into other languages? Furthermore, how many outstanding translations are produced? I am not optimistic that there will be better answers to these questions in the near future. If we are all to crowd together on the single plank of translation by following Damrosch's ideas and think that the road to world literature can only be this precarious route, then this is clearly a mark of our limited vision.

Becoming world literature is not limited to the path of translation: there are at least three other paths worth considering that Chinese scholarship and governmental policies have consistently overlooked. The first is *regional world literature*. For example, Karen Laura Thornber's "Rethinking the World in World Literature: East Asia and Literary Contact Nebulae"[13] is a valuable study on the regional world literatures of East Asia. Thornber argues that it was because of the advantages of occupying what is termed the "point of origin" that Western literatures became central, while Latin American, African, and Asian literatures as well as those of other "minor" regions were positioned on the periphery. Thornber argues that this discourse of world literature must be dismantled and replaced by research on world literature that would possess a more multidimensional understanding of literature, culture, and nationality. Thornber investigated the shared milieu of modern East Asian literatures, including the literature of Mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea, through processes of assimilation, adaptation, rejection, parody, resistance, loss, and finally transformation, as well as strategies of interpreting, adapting, translating, and intertextualizing informed by these processes, to point out how these "nebulae/nebulas" of literary contacts have formed a mutually independent but common corpus of literatures. Thornber's analysis of the effect of internal exchanges between literary works in non-Western regions helps to re-conceptualize the ideas of "local" and "global" and helps world literatures to find a way out of Eurocentrism.

The second path to world literature that appears to work is a path that consists in the attempt to create *world literature in Chinese*. The proposal and application of the concept of "world literature in Chinese" can indeed demonstrate the possibility—if not the reality—of world literature's increasing *Chineseness*. In my view, it can amount to an effective strategy that may allow Chinese literature to affect world literature. "World literature in Chinese" denotes both border-crossing and regional exchanges within and between languages and literatures. The approach is based on the framework inscribed in such concepts as "world literature in English," "world literature in French," "world literature in Spanish," and so on. It contains not only the goal of a steadily increasing globalization of Chinese literature as such—in other words, its increased adoption of globally relevant themes and issues and its ever more notable presence in worldwide literary markets (in the original, and not merely in translation!)—but also the concomitant goal of a certain ethical, thematic, and/or stylistic influence of Chinese literary works on regional literatures in Asia and, more generally, on the world's various literatures. In the last analysis, the approach underlying the concept of "world literature in Chinese" is based on a strong belief in the possibly beneficial effects of a "Sinification of world literature" that would perhaps counterbalance the present preponderance of English and the unquestionable "Americanization of world literature" we note at present. In this way, "world literature in Chinese" could become a strong voice in a concert of the world's voices that would help to reduce the dangers of monotony, uniformity, and homogenization. Clearly, the Chinese language provides a robust foundation for the concept in question, as it includes not only Mainland Chinese literature, but also Taiwanese literature, Hong Kong's literature, and the literature of overseas Chinese. Their roots are in Chinese language and culture, but they have spread their branches in a variety of places in the world, creating an array of unique scenes. In her book *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*, Shu-mei Shih proposed the concept of the "Sinophone" (a term that will remind many of the French term "la Francophonie"), which she defines as "a network of places of cultural production outside of China and on the margins of China and Chineseness."[14] Literature produced within this network can be said to participate in "world literature in Chinese." The collection *Selected Works of ASEAN Modern Chinese Literature*,[15] which comprises nine volumes and is edited by Tan Eng-Chaw (陈荣照), has recently been published and serves as a clear marker of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' world literature

in Chinese. In addition, world literature *in Chinese* as well as *by Chinese from Anglophone North America and Europe* has become a vibrant source of many impressive works. It must, of course, be recognized that world literature in Chinese has not yet achieved the global reach of world literature in English, but we look forward to this achievement.

The third path to world literature may be referred to as a paradigm and an empirically observable literary current that aims at *Chinese world literature*. This concept is to denote a world literature that is formed by *the connection to a shared heritage*, as noted also with respect to *Jewish world literature*, *African world literature*, and so on. The concept of Chinese world literature refers to the body of writers from China—or linked to their Chinese heritage—who write in the national language of their resident country, as in the case of Chinese British literature or Chinese French literature, and so on. Currently, Chinese American literature has the greatest influence, in the framework of the specific national literature within which it obviously happens to exist, but some of those authors who belong to this literary current achieve worldwide attention, their works experience reception in other countries, and they unquestionably become world literature. Writers such as Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, Frank Chin, Xiaolong Qiu, Ha Jin, and so on have all had a significant impact on American literature as well as on other literatures. For the countries in which these writers reside, their work has become a Chinese contribution to the national literature, but from the perspective of heritage, they have also become *an important part of the globalization of Chinese literature*. Historically, the English-language works of writers such as Yutang Lin and Eileen Chang have been seen as a part of American literature. In the contemporary era of multiple heritages, increasing universality of mixed ethnicity, and increasing normality of transnational migration, there is no need for us to shut these works out of our Chinese cultural sphere (on this, see in particular Dagnino; Sturm-Trigonakis, *Comparative Cultural*).

A subsection of the third route of "Chinese world literature" is world literature within the global sphere of Chinese culture. This refers to the shards of Chinese literature and culture which exist within foreign cultural spaces. The two previous forms of world literature all manifest themselves as actual texts and all have brought forth complete works. However, this form of the Chinese contribution to world literature does not take the shape of independent or complete works. Instead, it inhabits works outside the spaces influenced directly by Chinese literature and culture, and yet it makes up an integral part of the works. Thus, these works have also

become vessels of Chinese culture. The influence of Chinese literature and culture on the literatures of many cultures is widespread in the world, thus in East Asia, Europe, and also in the Americas.

Let me finally note that in the United States, there is currently a group of scholars researching Trans-Pacific poetics—an endeavor that is relevant both theoretically and with regard to its possible consequences for literary praxis, and that is focused mainly on the East Asian elements within US literature. Within the work of a large group of American poets and writers, including Ernest Fenollosa, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, Wai-Lim Yip, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Kenneth Rexroth, John Cage, Gary Snyder, Cid Corman, Robert Bly, W. S. Merwin, Robert Hass, and so on, *elements of Chinese literature and culture* are expressed and have come to constitute the research focus of Trans-Pacific poetics. This differs from traditional research on influence in that it withdraws from a singular focus on the narrowly defined concepts of textual influence and cultural sources and explores texts instead from the multiple angles of ethnography, translation, intertextual travel, and so on, thus allowing a uniquely comprehensive study of the dialogues, imaginings, intersections, and intermingling of the different localities contained within the work of these American poets and writers. The aim is to reveal the contours of the West, especially the ways in which Chinese culture has been injected into American literature by helping it to form its own unique qualities distinct from its roots in European cultures and literatures. In this type of world literature, the integration of Chinese culture with foreign cultures has been deep, its influence has been the most lasting, and it has made one of the most significant contributions. As this is the desired final outcome of the promotion of Chinese literature abroad, it deserves—and indeed has begun to receive—significant attention.

In conclusion, let me emphasize that world literature ought to be understood in the plural. As I see it, there exist already numerous forms of world literature and each one of them is significant. What we must do now is to work harder in our endeavor to strengthen the vitality of the corpus of Chinese literature by allowing it to grow and to increase at the same time its global impact, by testing a multitude of paths to worldwide attention and global recognition, thus allowing its significance as a part of *world literatures* to be more fully appreciated.

References

1. David Damrosch, Liu Hongtao, Yin Xing, *Theories of World Literature: A Reader*. Peking University Press, 2013, pp. 3–5.
2. David Damrosch, Liu Hongtao, Yin Xing, ibidem, pp. 66–76.
3. Liu Hongtao, "Two Practices of the Concept of World Literature in China in 1950s–60s", in: *Comparative Literature in China*, No. 3, 2010.
4. Zeng Xiaoyi, *Stepping into the World Literature: China's Modern Writers and Foreign Literature*. Changsha: Hunan People's Publishing House, 1985, pp. 1–40.
5. Chen Sihe, "The Global Elements of Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature: Editor's Note", in: *Comparative Literature in China* 38.1 (2000), pp. 31–32.
6. Chen Sihe, ibidem, p. 31.
7. Chen Sihe, ibidem, p. 31.
8. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*. Transl. M.B. De Bevoise. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
9. Stephen Owens, "The Anxiety of Global Influence: What is World Poetry?", in: *The New Republic*, November 19 (1990), pp. 28–32.
10. Andrew Jones, "Chinese Literature in the 'World' Literary Economy", in: *Modern Chinese Literature* 8.1–2 (1994), pp. 171–190.
11. See Zhang Yingjin, "Cultural Translation between the World and the Chinese: The Problematics in Positioning Nobel Laureate Gao Xingjian", in: *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 31.2 (July 2005), pp. 140.
12. David Damrosch. *What is World Literature?* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 281.
13. Karen Laura Thornber, "Rethinking the World in World Literature: East Asia and Literary Contact Nebulae", in: *World Literature in Theory*. Ed. David Damrosch. London: Wiley, 2014, pp. 460–79.
14. Shu-mei Shih. *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, p. 4.
15. Tan Eng-Chaw, ed. *Selected Works of ASEAN Modern Chinese Literature*. Singapore: The Youth Book Co., 2013.



CHAPTER 15

World Literature from and in China

Wolfgang Kubin

The word *Weltliteratur* (in English, *world literature*), current since 1827 after Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813) began to use it in 1790 and especially after Goethe (1749–1832) used it first in 1827, is all but a clearly defined term. This may be due to its semantic affinity with such terms as comparative literature, littérature universelle, universal literature, and general literature.

The widely acknowledged pragmatic meaning of *world literature* refers to a literature that is read, or that can be read, in the entire world thanks to translations. This implies basically that world literature and translation cannot be separated, and that the mere fact that a work is translated forms already a kind of criterion which indicates that it may find its way into the literary canon. This is why it is frequently said that the translators are the ones who create world literature.[1] And another well-known statement asserts that the modern era—which, we can assume, begins with the period marked by Goethe's overwhelming influence (1770–1830)—is a *translated* modern era. That is to say that the modern era, which—just like world literature—surpasses the national "component," owes its existence to ideas that can no longer be ascribed to individual states as separate

Translated by Andreas Weiland.

W. Kubin (✉)
Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, China
e-mail: kubin@uni-bonn.de

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8_15

entities, but that must be considered as a universally shared, common property. The most obvious example in this regard is Marxism, which could never have produced the "New China" without translation. To this extent Goethe was right when he spoke of the replacement of "Nationalliteratur" (national literatures)—thus, of one's own heritage and achievements ("das Eigene")—by "Weltliteratur," that is to say, the universally valid.[2] What is at stake is the shared human essence. In this way, the Good, Noble, and Beautiful turn into the new fatherland that is no longer identified with a concrete land or country. Writing and thinking thus attain cosmopolitical significance. It can be deduced therefore that significant and meaningful literature has to be international, and that it must become international by being translated. That is to say, it turns into a common property of all readers.

Here we encounter two specific problems, however. First, China was never an "open society." That which is cosmopolitan may have had a definite position in the beginning of the twentieth century—for instance, in the framework of Marxism. But at least since 1989, socialism, which should essentially be international, has assumed a Chinese character, and in so far a quality that does not surpass the national. Thus we encounter the strange, self-contradictory term "Socialism with Chinese characteristics." Second, translations from European languages to Chinese were first undertaken relatively late in time, during the 1860s, and thus in the final phase of the last imperial dynasty (1644–1911). And to translate still is not widely considered as an art, but rather as a mere craft and, at best, as a subsidiary discipline. Thus, it is a frequently heard saying that anybody can translate.

Everything that should be cosmopolitan by all means, in order to belong to modernity and "progress," is being played down in China until today, and this on all levels. Apart from socialism, it is literature which—according to the will of even the best and most representative Chinese writers—should reveal a national, and that is to say Chinese, component, whereas, according to Goethe's comprehension, it should belong to the entire world.

When we talk about *world literature*, we must differentiate in the case of China between a world literature stemming from China and a world literature in China. In both cases, not all literature passed on through the ages can be implied, but only that literature which forms part of the canon. The formation of a canon occurs in different ways. In China, the practice of assembling individual literary texts into a collection can be observed

rather early. Basically, this is the beginning of the history of Chinese literature. When we are told that Confucius (551–479) selected 300 songs from among 3000 and that he thus was able to edit the *Book of Songs* (or Book of Odes; Shijing), then it is not only this historically not particularly well-documented activity, but also its result which amounts to the appearance of the first Chinese literary canon. But is this already *world literature*? If we take seriously Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866) and his relatively early translation of said anthology (1833) from a second language—that is, from Latin—an affirmative response to this question could be given. But even the subsequent translations of texts taken from the *Book of Songs*—regardless of how well done they may have been—have not produced a lasting impression among readers in German-speaking countries. This contrasts with the editions of poetry written by the poet Li Bai (701–762) that provided, as we all know, the material for Gustav Mahler's (1860–1911) *Lied von der Erde* (Song of the Earth; 1907/08).

The term *world literature*, strictly seen, should be embedded in the context of the world market and world history. The latter two developed in the framework of European overseas history. We can thus only speak of world history since the late eighteenth century, when the scholars based in Europe began to look beyond Europe and as far as Japan. On the other hand, one does not speak of a world market before the advent of the phenomenon of globalization that is owed essentially to new communications technology such as the phone or the internet. But strictly speaking, such a view is a much too narrow one, as it is apparent that the introduction of the (Mexican) silver dollar in China during the sixteenth century, as an "international" currency that was only abandoned in 1935, does in fact signal the early ties of at least the Chinese port cities with the trade routes existing on the oceans of the world. Of course, we cannot speak in this context of any real and systematic acquisition of Chinese books. This set in, slowly but steadily, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the first libraries holding Chinese books began to be formed at European courts, such as the Prussian one.

The distribution of books requires of course a transport system, which must be preceded by communication. Relying on communication, on newspapers respectively all the media (book reviews, etc.), decisions can be taken as to what belongs into a library. For this purpose, a canon is necessary. The latter is being interpreted in different ways, however. The Chinese canon need not necessarily correspond to the one formed by "Western" sinology. Its translation activities and exploration of Chinese

literature by no means take only that for a yardstick which is current practice between Peking and Canton. Even inside China's world of learning, different views can be ascertained. Thus it is apparent that the significance of the poets Tao Yuanming (365–427) and Du Fu (712–770) as major writers was discovered at a relatively late time. We can say more or less the same with regard to classical novels and with regard to traditional plays. A *moral* or *political* aspect frequently was and is a selection criterion in the Middle Kingdom. This tendency was acerbated in the post-1949 phase and it has led since 1999 to a seemingly self-determined and independent canon free of Western influence. By now, the P.R. China has been spending a lot of money in order to make supposedly healthy literary works better known abroad, and it has been relying for this purpose on its own translations and publications. These publications also comprise the non-sellers of the revolution since 1942, which even at home are no longer read by anyone except a few scholars dedicated to literary studies. The political program that informs such activities is called *zouchuqu*, "going out," "going into the wide world." This new terminology signals the intention to determine for foreign readers, quite independently of "Western" sinology, which works must be considered as representative. Up to now, the initiative has not been successful. And this is not only for reasons that concern the content and for linguistic reasons, but also because Chinese book production does not conform to expectations in the target markets. The books are too thick, too heavy, and their design is too conservative. The Chinese book market, with its mainly state-owned publishing firms that are no longer financially supported by the government after their privatization (2003–2010), is profit oriented and thus bets on best-sellers. It supports almost exclusively authors who find an audience that can be counted by the millions, and it demands considerable payments from poets for the publication of "difficult" works, such as poetry.

Let us ask again: who determines today the canon and, thus, what is to be considered as *world literature* from China and in China? Primarily, four groups can be identified. (1) There is the Chinese state, with its program of "opening towards the outside world"—a program that also of course embraces the task of making known unquestionably classical works. (2) There is the Chinese book market, which is pushing mainly young authors, projecting them as pop stars, while financing the translation of only those foreign literary works that in all likelihood promise to be marketed easily. These works are mainly successful US novels. (3) There is the impact of

international sinology, which is influenced by literary production at home and translates, analyzes, and mediates, guided by the criteria of its home countries. As it is not particularly at home in Chinese society, the influence exerted is by and large very small. (4) There are English-language anthologies or series, such as *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* or "Columbia Great Books," produced in the United States, although they seem to include Chinese literature to a minimal extent. To be just, it is necessary to add that comparable lists, like the ones drawn up for instance by Marcel Reich-Ranicki (1920–2013) in the past, never included a single Chinese literary work.

How shall we now define *world literature*? I can only depart from my own criteria, which I owe primarily to German and Chinese sinology. I arrive in this way at evaluations which may well be shared by Chinese studies based in English-speaking countries. It is necessary to differentiate between all of that which should be read, from my point of view, but which is not necessarily registered by readers thirsting for light fiction from China, and that which occasionally experiences considerable reception, without satisfying, however, any high aesthetic expectations, and without exerting a big influence. Ruth Klüger (b. 1931) speaks of "throw-away literature" (*Wegwerfliteratur*; trash) in cases like the latter—that is to say, of books that are thrown away after being read. Let's repeat it again: in contrast to Japanese literature (especially that part of it which belongs to the modern and contemporary period), Chinese literature has no stable and large audience in German-speaking countries. Something very similar can be said about its reception in other language communities in Europe and America. It is mainly perceived in the universities, but even there sometimes only exceptionally. In the universities of German-speaking countries, for instance, there exists by now almost no chair for Chinese literature written before 1911; that is to say, for the beautiful writings produced before the demise of the Chinese empire. At the moment, only two chairs (in Bochum and Zurich) are dedicated to *literary studies*, which are by and large limited, however, to contemporary (since 1949) as well as modern (1912–1949) literature in China. Nonetheless, the entire Chinese literature is to be counted as *world literature* because it exerted an influence on the German spirit since Goethe's reception of it; and this even though—in a concrete case—only specialists, who write in turn for specialists, may know about it. It is for this reason that an erroneous, yet current opinion exists, according to which the literature of the Middle Kingdom is *unknown* in German-speaking areas. This is not so, because the sinology

of German-speaking countries produced—like no other discipline dedicated to Chinese studies, if we except China, Japan, and Korea—a vast number of literary histories and translations. Quantitatively, the sinology of English-speaking countries cannot compare with it at all! Due to existing language barriers, this is largely unknown abroad, however.

China has the oldest still living and very alive literature in the world. It starts—in the strict sense of literature as literature, and not in the sense of literature as writing—circa 1000 BC with the *Book of Songs*, long before its reception begins in areas we refer to today as states; namely, in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Thanks to Catholic missionary activity that begins in Asia at the end of the sixteenth century, the first useful and truly registered knowledge about Chinese writing reached the Occident at that time. In this context, philosophy played a pioneering role; literature followed hesitantly, somewhat later. This may be due to the close affinity of thought and religion on both sides. It was not before the eighteenth century that the first examples of Chinese poetry, drama, and stories appeared on the European continent in the form of partial translations. When Goethe was reading Latin, French, and English renditions, this did not mark the beginning of such reception, but he is the most important reader, because he accomplished superb appropriations, adaptations, and judgments. Even though the term *world literature* became a current term thanks to him, Chinese literature still had a long way to go before it was perceived not only in France, England, or Germany as great literature.

Even though the Chinese language has been taught at least since 1834 as a discipline at a German-language university (thus in Vienna), it took decades more before it was truly institutionally present at an academy, and not just appreciated as a language course. We must mention here the Institute for Oriental Languages (Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen; SOS) founded in Berlin in 1886, which experienced a rebirth shortly after 1945 at the University of Bonn. During its history that has lasted already more than 100 years, it has educated the first great and not merely academic translators who contributed essentially to the dispersion of Chinese literature in German-speaking areas. It suffices here to mention such names as Alfred Forke (1867–1944, drama), Franz Kuhn (1884–1961, novels), Alfred Hoffmann (1911–1997, poetry), Florian Reissinger (b. 1954), and Karin Hasselblatt (b. 1963). The latter two have translated both modern and contemporary literature. Of these, only Kuhn, Reissinger, and Hasselblatt have up to now been successful outside the purely academic realm.

Regarding the reception of Chinese literature—not only as world literature—the following factors played an essential role in German-speaking countries: the development that sinology underwent; the interest taken by literary centers[3] since the 1980s; the committed book market; and finally also the media that went to great lengths to feature dissidents.

Sinology is a young discipline. Officially, it took off in Germany with the establishment of the first chair of sinology in Hamburg in 1911. Due to historical events, it is possible to note different developments and diverse aspects focused on in the course of its academic history, which adds up by now to more than 100 years. Though it is true that Chinese literature has always been translated in German-speaking countries since the end of the nineteenth century, this was not necessarily accomplished for the general public or in a professional way. It is thus undeniable that the two most important Chinese poets, Li Bai (701–762) and Du Fu (712–770), have been available since the 1930s and 1940s in the form of complete translations. Their translator, Erwin Ritter von Zach (1872–1942), did not strive to accomplish a truly literary rendition, however, but attempted merely to produce a text serving for the studies of learners of the language that has received almost no reception. Translations based on English renditions by Arthur Waley (1889–1966) were more successful and became widely accepted. The example of Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) may be mentioned.

The following must be summed up here critically. Even though Chinese poetry, from its beginnings until the period of the Tang dynasty, was widely received in English-speaking countries and then also beyond these areas, thanks to the effort of Ezra Pound (1885–1972), this rarely led to translations of the complete works of individual authors, and even less to a broader perception. Strangely enough, this is even true with respect to modern literature. Thus we note that a complete edition (in six volumes) of the works of Lu Xun (1881–1936), the father of modern Chinese literature, exists in the “West” up to now only in German.

Even though Chinese literature is currently, by and large, accessible at least in German-language areas, thanks to translations and about a dozen literary histories—among them an edition that was projected to consist of ten volumes and that can be considered complete since 2012 after the appearance of nine volumes—an imbalance can be observed with regard to reception. Classical literature does not always sell well, modern literature even less so, and it is only with regard to contemporary literature that we can observe considerable demand on the part of the readership. It is not easily possible—and perhaps not without contradictions—to explain this.

With his translations of classical Chinese novels, Franz Kuhn was the first who perhaps succeeded in truly producing something that we can call *world literature* from China. His work was not only successful in German-speaking countries but, due to secondary translations, also internationally successful. This is even true in a strange way of Chinese-speaking areas, where his German versions have been re-translated into Chinese, due to the inaccessibility of the original versions of erotic literature. Since his versions of Chinese narrative art have been available for more than 80 years on the German book market, it may be possible in this individual case—as has happened already—to say of his rendition of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* (Hongloumeng, Chin. 1792, German 1932), in view of the more than 200,000 copies sold, that it now forms part of German literature, or German literary history.

As far as sold copies, number of reprints, and translations into secondary languages are concerned, nobody in the Occident can compare with Franz Kuhn. And yet, indirectly Howard Goldblatt (b. 1939) has turned out to be a serious competitor. This American translator of modern and contemporary Chinese literature has set standards for many non-American publishers betting on success. Thanks to his high art of translation, which aims neither at a "literal" nor a "complete" rendition, he has succeeded in creating world literature from China that has by now become obligatory as a signpost and model for the German book market. Whatever Goldblatt translates is published also in German, as if this were a law of nature; sometimes it is even translated from his English text rather than from the Chinese original, sometimes the translations are modeled after his versions, sometimes his titles and the authors favored by him are blindly chosen. The most striking example is the winner of the 2012 Nobel Prize in Literature, Mo Yan (b. 1955). The translator succeeded in shortening his novels and casting them into a form that should have been better attained when they were written.

Since the beginning of the new millennium, the P.R. China has coveted the position of a Great Power in the sphere of literature. It complains about the small number of translations and even less reception, but this complaint is focused solely on English-speaking areas and overlooks activities such as those in France and Germany, where Chinese literature was and still is explored, edited, and mediated in an exemplary way. Driven by ambition, the People's Republic finds itself compelled to train translators, to further the production of translations and their publication at home, and to direct their international distribution. Though 10 years have passed

already, the concept has not proven to be successful. The reasons for this are manifold. Quite often, the products are editions of previous English-language contributions, without being able to surpass them; secondary translations from incomprehensible English texts to German, in order to save costs (copyright), are frequent. The conventional design (cover, weight, paper quality, smell) has been mentioned already.

According to Chinese customary practice, there is no or no clear differentiation between literature in the narrowly defined sense and writing in the broader, more comprehensive sense. This "bad habit" infected sinology very early on, with the effect that philosophical and historical works from antiquity were also treated as "literature" and discussed in literary histories. If we separate *belles-lettres* strictly from Confucian or Taoist philosophy as well as annalist history, we have to concede an imbalance with regard to reception. Especially in the German-speaking area, works like the *Daode Jing* (Tao Te King) or *The Book of Changes* (Yijing, I Ging) enjoyed a wider reception than almost every individual, important, purely literary work from China. This cannot be due only to the quality of the translation, considering the fact that the Heidelberg-based sinologist Günther Debon (1921–2005), probably the best translator of classical Chinese poetry worldwide, also translated the *Daode Jing* very successfully. It seems that the "German" character shows a greater affinity to ancient Chinese philosophy than to Chinese literature—a phenomenon that is hard to explain.

Germany is a country of translators. Translations from all languages dominate the book market, something that contrasts markedly with the situation in the Anglo-American sphere. Even though German sinology has produced many other superb translators besides Günther Debon, thus Marc Hermann (b. 1970) or Ulrich Kautz (b. 1939), their translation activity has not yet produced a situation that would enable them to contribute—like Howard Goldblatt—to global recognition of a Chinese author. German, as the less widely spoken, thus "minor" language that it is in comparison to English, has turned against this.

If we attempted to draw up a canon of Chinese literature to which the character of *world literature* could be ascribed, and this based on German sinology—that is to say, on its translation activity and research—then we might still name—as a selection of representative examples—the following works, if they have not been mentioned already: *The Songs of the South* (Songs of Chu; Chuci, third century BC) with their shamanistic songs; the Chinese "Goethe" and universal genius Su Dongpo (1037–1101); the

man of the theater Tang Xianzu (1150–1617) with his praise of omnipotent love in his play *The Peony Pavilion* (Mudanting, 1598); Li Liweng (1610–1680) with his essays that are bursting with life; *Jin Ping Mei*, a novel (sixteenth century) that should be read not as pornography but as social criticism; the narrated feminist world of Xiao Hong (1911–1942) or Zhang Ailing (1920–1995); the poetry of Bei Dao (b. 1949) influenced by Spanish hermeticism; and the essays of Lin Yutang (1895–1976).

In a few cases the authors named above have experienced successful careers in the international book market. This is due to the literary centers and the media, which love to focus their attention on so-called dissenters or feminists. Thus we can note that Bei Dao was already nominated five times for the Nobel Prize in Literature. And the works of Xiao Hong, published by Suhrkamp, were sold out in no time at all. But it is to be feared that these important and representative authors will not become household names outside sinology or journalism.

References

1. In German-speaking countries, this is practically a stock phrase in literary circles: *Es sind die Übersetzer, welche die Weltliteratur schaffen*.
2. This apparently refers to *generally attained* technological levels, *generally attained* and recognized intellectual attainments, as well as *generally binding* norms and values.
3. The term *literary centers* refers to so-called *Literaturhäuser* or Houses of Literature, established by the Culture Department (or Cultural Office; Kulturamt; Kulturbüro) of many cities in Germany, Austria, etc.; these venues are open to the public and comparable, in the way they operate, to the Art Houses (*Kunsthäuser*). In France, *maisons de culture* fulfill similar functions.

Dialogue Section A: World Literature and Nation Building

David Damrosch

So let us talk about world literature and nation building. Sometimes world literature seems a kind of thing at the farthest end of the national. We have national literatures which exist in interaction with the wider world, as a kind of outer frame for the various national literatures. But I think it is more interesting to consider the way world literature interacts with national literatures in many ways, including the fact that often those who seek to build their national literature, or re-build that literature, look to the wider world for models and for inspiration. This has sometimes been seen as dependent or derivative, but actually in the hands of really creative artists, the inspirations from outside are always transformed fundamentally and become something new. Indeed, no national literature has ever developed independently of world literature, or at least independently of the literature of the wider region beyond the immediate nation; with the possible exception of Sumerian literature in the early Third Millennium, because no one else knew how to write. But even the Sumerian scribes were multilingual, drawing on many world traditions. The world's first patron of literature, King Shulgi of Ur, who reigned 4000 years ago,

D. Damrosch
Department of Comparative Literature, Harvard University,
Cambridge, MA, USA
e-mail: ddamrosc@fas.harvard.edu

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8

boasted that he could speak four languages at his court. So even Sumerian literature is not only Sumerian. What I would like to do in this chapter is to look at three cases of the building of the nation through world literature.

We will come in a moment to the Chinese case of the New Culture Movement, but I will begin by looking first at the Vietnamese case. This involves someone who I think is a really world-class author, little known outside Vietnam: Nguyễn Du, the founder of modern Vietnamese literature. He died in 1820, and his masterpiece is the verse novel called *Tale of Kieu*. Kieu is the heroine of the story. It is written in the verse form of Vietnamese folk songs, in Vietnamese, but it is in Chinese characters originally; then it becomes transliterated into the new Romanized alphabet. It is a beautiful novel. And the whole project is interesting because this is an adaptation from a Chinese novel, a prose text of a century before. Nguyễn Du remakes this in Vietnamese as a Vietnamese way of thinking about cultural identity. Its heroine Kieu has to become a prostitute in order to redeem her family from debts, she has a series of adventures, different lovers, and she is involved with a warlord, but she has a young love and she finally re-meets him at the end of the story. But at this point she becomes a Buddhist nun and renounces the world, and has her young fiancé marry her sister and they live happily ever after.

What is interesting about this story is that Nguyễn Du himself had worked for the previous dynasty until it was overthrown partly with French help. The French were just beginning to move into Indochina. And then, after a period of chaos, Nguyễn Du began to work for the new dynasty and he was accused of betraying the old one, prostituting himself in some way, and he identified with his heroine, Kieu, who has to survive the very difficult political transformation and she is herself an artist, she is a calligrapher, she plays the lute, she can compose poetry and she makes a new world for herself.

It is interesting that Nguyễn Du, as you can see, and the Vietnamese reader are a peripheral part of the Sinophone world. He identifies sometimes with female characters, Kieu here and also the female poet Hsiao-Ching. She was a seventeenth-century Chinese poet who was a concubine of a powerful man whose wife burned most of her poems; only a few survive. And Nguyễn Du writes this poem about reading her surviving poetry:

> West Lake flower garden: a desert now. Alone, at the window, I read through old pages. A smudge of rouge, a scent of perfume, but I still weep. Is there

> a fate for books? Why mourn for a half-burned poem? There is nothing, there is no one to question, and yet this misery feels like my own. Ah, in another three hundred years will anyone weep, remembering my fate?[1]

It is very interesting that he identifies with these female poets. He then begins to be seen as the founder of modern Vietnamese literature. He writes the *Tale of Kieu* in a traditional folk meter called "luc bat" or "six eight" meter. So he is adapting a Chinese novel to Vietnamese verse form and creating the first great work in modern literature in Vietnamese. He becomes the hero later on for the resistance against the French and the American colonial occupation. A very interesting poem about him was written in 1950 by Chế Lan Viên, who was a founder of the Marxist Vietnamese Writers Association. It expresses his thoughts about Nguyễn Du's great masterpiece:

> Born to those foul times of dusk and dust, you reached and touched no soul mate by your side. Your sorrow matched the fate of humankind: Kieu spoke your thoughts and crystallized your life. [Chế Lan Viên clearly sees that Nguyễn Du is identifying with this heroine.] Kings rose and fell – the poem still abides. You fought and won your feats on waves of words. You planted stakes in the Bach-dang of time: our language and the moon forever shine.[2]

That is brilliant: images planting stakes in the Bach-dang of time; but the poem is doing that itself. It was a Vietnamese general who planted stakes in the title's Bach-dang river to impale the ships of Chinese invaders in the fourteenth century. So in 1950, Chế Lan Viên remembers this, and he sees the poem as planting stakes in the Bach-dang of time; this is a great image. At the same time as he clearly takes inspiration from Nguyễn, Chế Lan Viên wishes that Nguyễn would be more nationalist. Nguyễn was not a nationalist, he was a Sinophone intellectual. He sees all the Chinese tradition as his own tradition, part of that wider Sinophone world. In Chế Lan Viên's poem this is criticized a little, as he sees it as a defect that this great foundational work of Vietnamese literature is based on a Chinese original. He says:

> Why borrow foreign scenes? Our land flows not with one Ch'ien-t'ang but many fateful streams. (We get a lot of water in Vietnam and you didn't need a foreign source.) Why split yourself? Nguyễn Du, Tu Nhu, Thanh Hien, these are Nguyễn Du's pen names he uses, the tears in Kieu merge all three into one. Need we one century more to feel for Nguyễn? Like the poems

just recalled in the introduction, I may ask, will anyone weep for me. Mourning our nightfalls, we soon grieve for his. We love king's calls to arms, yet we shall not forget those frost-white reeds along Kieu's road.[3]

This is a fascinating case in which the modern nationalist celebrates the foundation of the national literature in Vietnam, and just wishes that Nguyễn Du was himself a bit more nationalist. But Nguyễn Du was using world literature, which for him was Chinese literature, to build Vietnamese literature in a very radical way.

In the century after Nguyễn Du, world literature began to serve a similar course in China itself. Here I will tell you a story. During the summer of 1915, a small circle of Chinese students at Cornell University in the USA were debating the crucial literary and linguistic questions of their day. Should classical Chinese be abandoned in favor of the vernacular spoken by the common people? Should Chinese script be written in the traditional way or simplified, as they worried it might be replaced altogether, and Romanized as the Vietnamese had done? Should contemporary writers continue to use classical literary forms at all, or do new social conditions require new modes like the European novels and stories? They are far from Beijing or any other center. These friends are hammering out their ideas with great intensity and their discussions soon have a tremendous impact on the New Culture Movement. But for all the Modernists, as for the literati centuries before them, the precious of poems is in the late-night drinking sachets. They are brilliant and polemical, arrogant and self-mocking, testing the limits of language and friendship alike. Their debate continues throughout the school year and reaches its climax during the next year, when the classical Mandarin member of the group, Mei Chin-chuang, accuses his friend Hu Hung-hsing of just recycling and thus stealing ideas from Tolstoy. Hu replied with a long poem written in the vernacular. He at once demonstrated the possibilities of this sub-literate language, and also tried to dominate the debate somewhat. He says in the poem that old Mei, his friend who was 20 years old, has entered the battlefield: "Banging on the table, cursing Hu Shih, saying that his words are really too ridiculous. Old Mei rambles on, old Hu laughs heartily hardly. Let's regain our equanimity, what kind of debate is this! Words aren't new or old, but they may be dead or alive."[4] Hu, whose proper name is Hu Hung-hsing, became better known by his pen name Hu Shih. In the pen name, Hu means the fittest, a name that echoes a watchword of that time, the survival of the fittest.

What strikes me as noteworthy about this debate is that it does not take place in a city in Sichuan or Hunan, but as I said at Cornell University, which Hu had entered to pursue his studies. He started in the Department of Agriculture, but got tired of the study of apples, pomology, which may be useful for apple growers in the state of New York, but did not seem that important to him for building a modern China. Thus he switched to literature and philosophy, and went on to study philosophy at Columbia University under John Dewey. He wrote his famous manifesto following these debates, and it was published in *La Jeunesse* or *New Youth* magazine as "Some Principles of Literary Reform." The very name of *La Jeunesse*, and the fact that the journal has a Chinese and a French title, proclaims its internationalism. So *La Jeunesse* was very much committed to the whole circle of intellectuals around Hu Shih, very much committed to building a new national traditional culture as well as literature, and through a lot of interaction with world literature. Zhou Zuoren, a brother of Lu Xun, of course did extensive translation from Greek, Japanese, English, French, German and Russian literature, often via Japanese. He promoted insight into the necessity of doubting antiquity, but this did not mean giving up antiquity: it meant re-examining Confucian texts and ancient classics using modern textual and critical methods. He, like Hu Shih, championed vernacular literature.

Hu Shih's friend Lin Yutang wrote in his memoirs that when Hu returned to Beijing from Columbia University after getting his PhD, he found himself a national celebrity. Lin Yutang wrote, "Hu Shih returned with national claim to join in Peking University and I was at Tsinghua to greet him. It was an electrifying experience."

Now it is possible to tell this story as a conversion narrative, in which Hu Shih comes to America, discovers European culture and American pragmatism and returns to spread the gospel of Westernization. Certainly, he learned a lot from Cornell courses in French, German and English, he majored in comparative literature, and he learned a lot from John Dewey in philosophy at Columbia. Yet, as we see from Hu Shih's exchanges with his friends at Cornell, he was developing his own ideas first and mostly in the circle of fellow Chinese emigrés, who were concerned about China's own cultural history and modern needs. When his friend Mei accuses him of promoting warmed-up Tolstoyism, Hu later writes: "I laughed a lot, when I heard this. I thought I was talking about Chinese literature entirely from the Chinese point of view. I was not at all interested or concerned with the opinion of European or western critics."[5]

He might even be protesting a little too much, but the basic concern was clearly there. Hu's subsequent scholarship in journalism is closely bound up with this public role as the leader of building modern China and Chiang Kai-shek's government in the 1930s and early 1940s. He served several years as president of Bei Da, and he tried unsuccessfully to mediate when the Kuomintang repressed student protests. Later he served in the national assembly, then he became an ambassador to the United States. He was never a fan of the Communists, but he was never a Kuomintang man either. He was really an independent intellectual. Throughout his life he insisted that political action needed to be based on careful thoughts, grounded in deep cultural learning. As he wrote in the 1960s: "I do not condemn revolutions, but I don't favor premature revolutions, because they are usually wasteful. My longstanding attitude is: come with me and let us educate the people."[6]

I think this is how we can understand the presence of world literature in the pages of *New Youth* magazine. It is not the kind of a process we sometimes see described by Western theorists of world literature in which a metropolitan culture sweeps over a periphery literature and takes its place, as described by Franco Moretti, for example, regarding the waves of the novel arriving all around the world. On the contrary, in the hands of Hu Shih or Zhou Zuoren, we see that world literature is a double-edged sword: it is against the old Chinese imperial system and against foreign empires seeking to dominate China, politically and economically, including the Japanese increasingly.

This double-edged project is well illustrated by a surprising advertisement, which appears in an early issue in the second year of *New Youth* magazine, where it was placed for the Boy Scouts Association of China. The Boy Scouts were closely associated with the British imperial project, training future masters of the empire, in India in particular. It was about the colonial grasp of India, so it was not to be expected that these progressive anti-imperialists would accept an advertisement from the Boy Scouts in the pages of *New Youth*.

However, it turns out that, as the advertisement continues, we begin to see which values were cherished here. The emphasis on scouting is not intended to make soldiers out of boys, nor is it intended to lead youths to interfere with the government of the country. There are no political aims: scouts are taught to use their hands and eyes and to do anything which any ordinary healthy boy ought to do; a well-trained scout is able to tie knots, signal with flags, help wounded or sick people, make maps, play musical instruments, cook and mend clothes, and he is also encouraged to live a healthy, open life.

All of this is seen in the Chinese Boy Scouts of Shanghai, swinging down the roads with their own bands playing lively music. One cannot fail to note their healthy appearance. Instead of wasting leisure time dawdling along in the streets and alleys, the Boy Scouts of China are filling every moment with useful and healthy hobbies: camping in the open air, or cooking, washing and cleaning, and all of this governed by rules. Now what does this mean? If they are swinging down the streets instead of dawdling in the alleys, they are not taking opium, right? They are not doing what the British were trying to get them to do, which is to be passive consumers of drugs; nor are they having servants still doing things the upper-class Chinese men were never supposed to do: cooking, mending clothes. So the Boy Scouts are being mobilized both against the British imperialists and against the old mandarin system at the same time. And in this context, we get these more obviously political interventions, thus Marxism, the French revolutionary anthem, and some French and English here and there, translated into Chinese.

There is also a very interesting poem by Joseph Plunkett, a hero of the Irish rebellion against Britain, who had been executed after the Easter Uprising. On the day of his execution he marries his childhood sweetheart and writes this poem, facing death and wishing for a better future. That's very revolutionary. But you also have Oscar Wilde and his play *An Ideal Husband*. We would not expect to see Oscar Wilde in the company of the revolutionary, as represented by Plunkett and by Marxism. But what they chose was *The Ideal Husband*, in which there was a swindle connected to financial speculation. Sir Robert Chiltern, one of the characters, says: "let us call things by their proper names. It makes matters simpler. We have all the information about it at the Foreign Office." It was just a fake scheme to steal money, pretending to build a canal.

Two things are interesting. They like this fact that Oscar Wilde can use comedy for social commentary. This was not present in the Chinese tradition before Lin Yutang, who introduced humor into Chinese essays. They also see Wilde as a socialist, which was still hardly known, and they choose this moment to make his phrase one of most Chinese expressions you could find: "let us call things by their proper names." The rectification of names and things was an old Confucian principle for governmental reform.

You see this code in the famous story of Ah-Q by Lu Xun. As Confucius says, if the name is not right, the words are not true. It is the right sentiment. And Lu Xun says in this famous preface: "I don't even know how to write Ah-Q's name, which leaves me no choice but to transcribe the mys-

terious Quei into the English alphabet, abbreviating it for convenience's sake to Q: Ah-Q [Ah-Q's name is the Roman character Q] which compromise reduces me to the level of those reprobates in charge of *New Youth* magazine,"[7] which even published the "Diary of a Madman." We see here world literature being mobilized very strategically against both foreign and classical Chinese opponents, notably in Lu Xun's famous story "A Madman's Diary," which he wrote loosely based on Gogol's famous story soon after he read the Japanese translation of Gogol's story of a madman, where the narrator goes to visit a couple of brothers; he finds one brother, but the other has gone away to get a government post. But having been crazy, he gets cured. And the narrator, supposed Lu Xun, is relating a kind of medical case, a case history, and this is certainly based on the Gogol story "Diary of a Madman." But it is also very much concerned with how to modernize Russia in a chaotic time and a rather peripheral situation. Gogol's madman thinks he is a king of Spain, which is peripheral on the other side of Europe, whereas in Lu Xun's story, this is the scene where you can see that he must have taken note that Gogol's madman thinks Spain may be China:

> Being left alone, I decided to occupy myself with state affairs. I discovered that China and Spain are absolutely one and the same land, and it is only out of ignorance today considered two separate countries. I advise everyone purposely to write Spain on a piece of paper, and it will come out as China.

I like to imagine that this is the moment when Lu Xun said: "I could write that story, if it is the same in China; let me give the Chinese version." It makes me very happy to imagine this. I don't have any proof that Lu Xun focused on that moment, but it is perfect for our purposes. And something else that Lu Xun did was very interesting in that story. His madman was very concerned not to be eaten up by the past. So, whereas the problem for Gogol is to go beyond the peripheral space of Europe, the problem for Lu Xun is that modern China is peripheral to the temporal past, a dominating classical heritage that was eating up the past and using up the present. And the madman says he is afraid that his older brother will eat him up, his older brother may have already eaten up his sister. This is a very interesting transformation from space to time, and a completely creative re-orientation. Let me just say it: he also talks about the scrawl all over the history pages. What was scrawled over the pages was Confucian

Virtue and Morality. This scrawl over the pages was about history and he can't bear to think of it.

Let me offer my modest contribution to the study of the story. I think the ending is meant to be discussed together with the beginning, and I think this is not being discussed in existing scholarship on Lu Xun; the question is, why are there two brothers? The story begins with two brothers,

> whose names I need not mention here, who were both friends of mine in high school, but after a separation of many years we gradually lost touch of each other. Some time ago I happened to hear that one of them, (we don't know which one) was seriously ill, and since I was going back to my old home I interrupted my journey to call on them. I saw only one, however, who told me that the invalid was his younger brother. I appreciate your coming such a long way to see us, he said, but my brother recovered some time ago and has gone elsewhere to take up an official post. Then, laughing, he produced the diary.[8]

Why have the two brothers? Why is it that the narrator doesn't know which brother he is talking to? The brother tells him he is the older brother, but why doesn't he simply recognize him? My particular interpretation is that this is now a modernist radical ambiguity, something that I think Lu Xun is getting from the contemporary European literature of the time that is going back to Gogol and Dostoevsky, but especially from the more modern. We don't know which brother it is; in fact it could be a crazy idea that the madman has now gotten a government post. So the first possibility is that the madman has been cured and has gone away, but the other possibility at the end of story is that the madman thinks his brother is about to kill him, and maybe he has made a protective first strike. Maybe the narrator is now meeting the madman who has killed and eaten his brother; maybe the narrator is a visitor stopping at the deserted house in the middle of the night—you don't have to have seen too many horror movies to know what happens next. He may then be the next one to be eaten by the madman. It's very interesting. I think it is the only way to explain this complex and weird beginning when we don't know who is being referred to. I think it shows a very deep interaction of Europe and China to create this sort of ambiguity typical of modern literature, brought into a very new political situation and this for political purposes.

So we have the medium-sized nation of Vietnam on the periphery being reconstructed through world literature in Nguyễn Du, we have China, the largest nation in the world, the middle kingdom that wants again to become the cultural center through the resources of world literature. Now let's look at my final example, and this is a quite different case. Here is national literature being created from a really peripheral region, the little island of Saint Lucia in the Caribbean, by Derek Walcott, the Noble Prize winner. It is an extraordinary thing for a Noble Prize winner to come from a tiny island in the Caribbean. And he is turning to world literature as a way to place Saint Lucia on the map, and to place himself there, as a world author. I want to read a poem with you, a fantastic poem by Walcott written in 1976, when he was in his 40s and had made his career already. The poem is called *Volcano*:

> Joyce was afraid of thunder,
> but lions roared at his funeral
> from the Zurich zoo.
> Was it Zurich or Trieste?
> No matter, these are legends, as much
> as the death of Joyce is a legend,
> or the strong rumor that Conrad
> is dead, and that *Victory* is ironic.[9]

Victory is one of Conrad's great novels set in the Malay archipelago. Here Walcott is making fun of the idea that the colonial periphery gets the news late, as though it takes months for the Parisian newspapers to arrive, as though—apparently in 1976—he does not even know if Conrad is dead, or if Joyce is buried in Zurich or in Trieste.

> On the edge of the night-horizon
> from this beach house on the cliffs
> there are now, till dawn
> two glares from the miles-out-
> at-sea derricks.[10]

Derek Walcott loves puns: the miles-out-at-sea "derricks" are like himself. But what makes these miles-out-at-sea derricks glare? They could be offshore drilling platforms for British Petroleum or Exxon Mobil, with the natural gas pouring out at night.

The poem continues:

they are like the glow of the cigar
and the glow of the volcano
at *Victory*'s end.
One could abandon writing
for the slow-burning signals
of the great, to be, instead,
their ideal reader, ruminative,
voracious, making the love of masterpieces
superior to attempting
to repeat or outdo them,
and be the greatest reader in the world.[11]

That is the temptation for the colonial peripheral subject: just read the great Europeans, don't do anything yourself.

At least it requires awe,
which has been lost to our time;
so many people have seen everything,
so many people can predict,
so many refuse to enter the silence
of victory, the indolence
that burns at the core,
so many are no more than
erect ash, like the cigar,
so many take thunder for granted.
How common is the lightning,
how lost the leviathans
we no longer look for!
There were giants in those days.
In those days they made good cigars.
I must read more carefully.[12]

What an extraordinary poem—not least because after all he writes the poem about the temptation not to write but to be the perfect reader; he writes this beautiful poem in which he is taking in, or you can almost say cannibalizing, the entire modern or Western tradition. Here you have not only Joyce, you have Conrad, also you clearly have Melville's *Moby-Dick*, so the great American novel as well as great European novels. And in every case, Walcott is deliberately choosing exiles, immigrants, for his reading: a

Joyce exiled from colonial Ireland writing in Italy; Conrad a Polish-born Russian subject residing in England; Melville socializes with Typee. Walcott's poem also makes its extraordinary claim against both colonial authority and more political writers who want to do away with Western tradition. His poem argues that you need that tradition to become great, but not just by imitating what they are doing.

Rather like Nguyễn Du was taking a prose novel and making a verse narrative about it, Walcott takes prose writers and makes their work into poetry. He also makes extraordinary demands on the reader. The special canons that we really have to learn are two: one is the Western kind of world literature; the second is the canon of Walcott's own poetry. This is the only way to know what it means when he says at the end that in those days they made good cigars. You have to know that is a reference to his father Warwick Walcott; he regularly meets the father in poems and it is his father who appreciated a good cigar.

His father died at age 30, when Walcott was a boy; his father dreamed of being an artist and a poet, and did not live long enough. And Walcott has now the career his father could never have, partly by bringing his father and his mother back to life in his poetry. You see that particularly in his ambitious verse novel *Omeros*, the great novel that led very directly to the winning of the Nobel Prize soon after it was published in 1990. It retells the stories of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the Homeric epics, set on Saint Lucia. It is a beautiful novel and, again rather like Nguyễn Du, Walcott makes a verse novel out of the earlier epic works. And at one very interesting point, he meets the ghost of his father Warwick Walcott, who appears to him and says:

> I grew up where alleys ended in a harbor
> and Infinity wasn't the name of our street;
> where the town anarchist was the corner barber
>
> with his own flagpole and revolving Speaker's seat.
> There were rusted mirrors in which we would look back
> on the world's events. There, toga'd in a pinned sheet,
>
> the curled hairs fell like commas.
> On their varnished rack,
> *The World's Great Classics* read backwards in his mirrors
> where he doubled as my chamberlain. I was known
>
> for quoting from them as he was for his scissors.
> I bequeath you that clean sheet and an empty throne.[13]

Walcott has a personal mythology that his father was named after Warwickshire, where Shakespeare came from, and was born on Shakespeare's birthday, and Walcott believed he could become a Shakespeare through his father, so this is also a heritage from Europe. Then his father gives his son his poetic vacation, he shows Derek a vision of the servant women from his childhood carrying the coal on their back up to the foreign ships:

> Kneel to your load, then balance your staggering feet
> and walk up that coal ladder as they do in time,
> one bare foot after the next in ancestral rhyme. […]
>
> higher than those hills of infernal anthracite.
> There, like ants or angels, they see their native town,
> unknown, raw, insignificant. They walk, you write;
>
> keep to that narrow causeway without looking down,
> climbing in their footsteps, that slow, ancestral beat
> of those used to climbing roads; your own work owes them
>
> because the couplet of those multiplying feet
> made your first rhymes. Look, they climb, and no one knows them;
> they take their copper pittances, and your duty
>
> from the time you watched them from your grandmother's house
> as a child wounded by their power and beauty
> is the chance you now have […].[14]

It gives those feet the voice. It is a beautiful, beautiful passage. And you know the form, this is a form of Dante Alighieri's terza rima, very loosely adapted to English, so it connected entirely the epic tradition based on Homer's stories and revised by Dante later, and linked to James Joyce and Conrad. Walcott is really connecting his entire life, and giving voice to the feet of his countrymen through world literature, on this tiny island that has never been on the map of world culture at all.

So these are my three examples, to show from an early Vietnamese case, and one from the New Culture Movement, and one from the contemporary world—from the largest country in the world to one of medium size and one of the smallest countries—that world literature helps in building nations large and small.

References

1. Nguyễn Du, "Reading Hsiao-Ching" and selections from *The Tale of Kieu*. In David Damrosch et al., eds., *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2d. ed., 2009, Vol. E, pp. 252–282.
2. ChếLan Viên, "Thoughts on Kieu." In David Damrosch, ed., *The Longman Anthology of World Literature* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2d ed. 2009), volume E, pp. 282–283.
3. Chế Lan Viên, "Thoughts on Kieu." In David Damrosch, ed., ibidem, pp. 282–283.
4. Hu Shih, *An Autobiographical Account at Forty*. In Li Tu-ning, ed., *Two Self-portraits: Liang Chi-ch'ao and Hu Shih*. New York: Outer Sky Press, 1992, pp. 32–188.
5. Hu Shih, *An Autobiographical Account at Forty*. In Li Tu-ning, ed., ibidem, pp. 32–188.
6. Hu Shih, *An Autobiographical Account at Forty*. In Li Tu-ning, ed., ibidem, pp. 32–188.
7. Lu Xun. "Diary of a Madman." In *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China: The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun*, tr. Julia Lovell. London and New York: Penguin, 2009, pp. 15–31.
8. Lu Xun. "Diary of a Madman." Ibidem, pp. 15–31.
9. Derek Walcott, "Volcano." *Collected Poems 1948–1984*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986, p. 324.
10. Derek Walcott, "Volcano." Ibidem.
11. Derek Walcott, "Volcano." Ibidem.
12. Derek Walcott, "Volcano." Ibidem.
13. Derek Walcott. *Omeros*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990, p. 71.
14. Derek Walcott. *Omeros*. Ibidem, p. 75 f.

Dialogue Section B: The Interactions between the Local and the Universal: A Few Thoughts after Listening to the Talk of Professor Damrosch

Lu Jiande

Let me say that I am deeply humbled by the presence of distinguished scholars from both abroad and home. Toward the end of his speech, Professor Zhang Longxi said that he would rather be a citizen of the world and that, in the eighteenth century, among English novels, there is a book called *Citizen of the World*, and the hero is a Chinese philosopher from Henan, whose name is Lien Chi Altangi. The book is by Goldsmith. So, to a certain extent, a kind of Chinese culture is always related to the discussion of world literature and citizens of the world. I want to make a transition here, because Longxi has talked in his speech about the present situation of culture and literature in the world and the imbalance which exists now. But I would say perhaps, as a Chinese scholar, that we should not complain too much, because we have to analyze why this is the situation.

Professor David Damrosch gave us something very interesting to think about in his talk "Frames for World Literature." I made a very hasty reading last night and I found these lines particularly stimulating. He said: "Many works, however, do not take on a new meaning and new stature

Lu Jiande
Institute of Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS),
Beijing, China
e-mail: lujd@cass.org.cn

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8

when read abroad, either because the language simply is not translatable without crippling losses or because their frame of reference is so exclusively local that they have little resonance abroad. Such works may be treasured and inferential within their home tradition, but never become works of world literature in any effective sense; they are read abroad, if at all, only by specialists in their culture and language of origin."

I think that as Chinese scholars and literature professors and even as Chinese poets, we need to be more carefully attentive to these lines, because complaint is not enough. We could say that we should have more Chinese literary works translated in the Western world and also all over the world, and then people would immediately become admirers of Chinese literary tradition. Perhaps this is not the case; thus, we have to ask what world literature is, what kinds of preconditions would make literary works acceptable to target countries and target cultures when they are translated. That is very important. Last night I had the chance to review Professor Damrosch's work *What Is World Literature?* and I found that he offered very stimulating readings of particular texts or particular authors, whose works traveled abroad in the form of translation, sometimes in different translations, even by way of transformation. So he would examine the differences between and among these translations, then try to present his arguments that now actually the translator has played a very important role. And thus, perhaps the original author in that context is not as important as we imagine. Professor Damrosch used the example of Menchú, an Indigenous author from Guatemala. She has a lot of sufferings to tell us about, but the accounts of her sufferings were translated into other languages, and then we find that the translations could be quite different from the original. So we have to ask what kind of role the translator played. What is the difference between the translated texts and the original texts? And sometimes the original text perhaps is not retrievable.

Thus we have to use different versions of translations to find a kind of outline of the original texts. In the work of his that I referred to, I think Professor Damrosch has particularly mentioned his collaboration with Chinese scholars in the area of world literature and comparative literature, and he tried to make the distinction between two concepts, "centrifugal" and "centripetal." I think these two concepts are very important. He said that only when we have already been able to open ourselves, and to open our cultural heritage, will it be possible to keep accounts of active interaction with neighboring cultures and literature conditions. In that case, the

native culture and its fruitful commitment to literary translation would survive. And we must also be ready to adopt other perspectives, and other frameworks, to look at literature from different places.

In "World Literature and Nation Building," Professor Damrosch gave some concrete details about the interactions between the local and the universal, between world literature and nation building. I would say that the title looks a bit like an oxymoron, because there exist contradictions between world literature and nation building. This is fascinating, because we found that nation building sometimes needs to have a broader frame of reference, and that reference is from other places, from a literary tradition different from our own. So the development of Chinese literature, especially Chinese modern literature, gives a very adequate example of these kinds of contradictions. But we all found that quite brilliant creative energy has been coming out of this. There are these clashes between the local and the universal, and sometimes we saw that world literature has totally transformed the Chinese idea of traditional literature and given it a new face. Nowadays, we all live in that kind of cultural legacy; it is not something we could deny or denounce.

But if we talk about concrete persons and concrete works, I would say that we have some very interesting cases, especially the case of the Vietnamese novelist Nguyễn Du. I am afraid most Chinese students of world literature and comparative literature are not sufficiently acquainted with the literary traditions of our neighboring countries, especially Vietnam and Korea. Professor Damrosch gave us an example of a Vietnamese author living in the eighteenth century, the crucial time when they had to make the very difficult choice of cultural and national identities. Actually Nguyễn Du wrote his pieces in Chinese characters. So I would say that the literatures of Vietnam and Korea and Japan, at that time, are more or less satellite literatures. But I am not saying this with the attitude of a kind of sinocentrism, I am trying to describe the situation as objectively as possible. So, to borrow Raymond Williams' concept of "structure of reference," I found lots of things in his work, in his rewriting, that contain many allusions to classical Chinese literature, for instance West Lake; I am from Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. He also used images of Qiantang, either as the name for Hangzhou or in a similar way, and of course there is also a very famous river called Qiantangjiang. So that is why the critics in the 1950s would criticize Nguyễn Du, saying that there are many waters and streams (in Vietnam), why should you particularly use the image of Qiantang? The critics of the mid-twentieth century became

more clearly *nation aware*. So that is why Chế Lan Viên found that he should try to cut the kind of cultural linkage that existed between Nguyễn Du and traditional Chinese literature.

As to Hu Shi and Lu Xun, I think nowadays we have many scholars specializing in these two founding fathers of modern Chinese literature. I would say of both Hu Shi and Lu Xun that they are translators of world literature. I also tried to find the original Chinese vernacular poem that Damrosch translated, *Da Mei Jinzhuang*. It was written on July 22, 1916.

> 人闲天又凉, 老梅上战场。拍桌骂胡适, 说话太荒唐!说什么中国要有活文学!说什么须用白话作文章!
>
> 老梅牢骚发了, 老胡呵呵大笑。且请平心静气, 这是什么论调!文学没有古今, 却有死活可道。

This is the original Chinese vernacular poem. I think that at that time, even if China regarded itself as the center of the world, calling itself the central kingdom, things that took place in peripheral places decided its future. At that time Hu Shi was a student at Cornell. He was actively involved in local social activities and he was a very eager member of a cosmopolitan club, once even a chairperson of the club, and he joined in a lot of debates. I would say that this is a particular historical context, because when the First World War broke out in 1914, the United States and, generally speaking, the American media were condemning the war, saying that it would be too brutal, it would cause so much human loss. So at that time, I would say that Hu Shi was influenced by this American background. If we contextualize, we can find that his cosmopolitan attitudes are quite in line with the kind of American non-interventionist policy prevalent at that time. However, Hu Shi gradually changed in 1917. He supported America when it joined the war. Also at that time China was following the United States, it also declared war on Germany, not because China was America's partner, but because China was so concerned with the consequences of the peace that would result. And thus, on the one hand Hu Shi would say in the 1920s that he never was a nationalist, but on the other hand he tried to revive the Chinese national culture heritage, which in Chinese we call 整理国故.

But Lu Xun was strongly against this. Lu Xun would talk about Hu Shi's effort regarding the revival of Chinese traditional cultural heritage as something totally reactionary. As you know, Lu Xun himself was an anarchist; in 1907, in Tokyo, Japan, there was a group of Chinese anarchists,

and they launched a magazine which would be very influential. In the same year, in Paris, there was a group of Chinese intellectuals, led by a founding father of the nationalist party—this is again a paradox—so the founding fathers of the nationalist party were anarchists in the first two decades of the twentieth century; these people were Wu Zhihui, Li Shizeng and Zhang Jingjiang, and the group included also Cai Yuanpei. They launched a magazine called *New Century*. At that time I would say that perhaps they went to extremes; somebody would argue, for instance, that the national language should be abolished. So, when we talk about the active and fruitful interaction between nation building and the spread of world literature, we also need to be a little careful, and must beware of the possible consequences of all kinds of very uniform ideas projecting world culture. Because at that time they said that all national languages have a very dirty historical past. We need to start anew, they said. That's why people in the first two decades of the twentieth century, people like Lu Xun, Cai Yuanpei and Hu Shi, were so carried away by the idea that Esperanto should be the language of the world. Thus world literature came to China hand in hand with the spread of that idea of Esperanto. It seemed that we should all use this new language, so we would all became totally equal citizens of the world, using one language that would not have any cultural or historical burdens. Of course, this kind of effort would be futile, because Esperanto is a language without a history and without a very rich "burden" of literary tradition. It couldn't go very far.

But somehow the idea of Esperanto became part of the orthodox ideology in China. This was because in China, we have a so-called internationalism, and internationalism means that we have to get away from the national, its very limiting boundaries. We have to transcend national boundaries to reach the status of being international, being part of the world. But sometimes such Utopian dreams can be futile. So the fate of Esperanto in China is very telling: even at the end of the Cultural Revolution, newspapers still carried articles about students using Esperanto and reported who had written many books in Esperanto. One author at that time, in the early 1980s, was very famous; his surname was Su. One of the leading novelists in China in the twentieth century, Ba Jin, who was also an anarchist, was influenced by that group of Chinese intellectuals living in Paris. He helped translate "Cooperation" (i.e., "Mutual Aid") by Kropotkin, and Ba Jin even maintained his enthusiasm for Esperanto after the Cultural Revolution. He went to Sweden to attend a worldwide, very important annual gathering of Esperanto supporters in the early 1980s. I think it is very rare for one of

the leading novelists of a big country to attend a conference on Esperanto. Nowadays no one talks about Esperanto in China, although that particular episode could be illuminating when we are discussing issues like world literature and the fate of Esperanto.

I was particularly impressed by Professor Damrosch's reading of "A Madman's Diary," and I think it is a noteworthy contribution to Lu Xun studies. Nowadays, in China, perhaps there are thousands of professors claiming to be specialists on Lu Xun. However, Professor Damrosch's reading, especially of the end of "A Madman's Diary," is very illuminating, revealing Lu Xun as a kind of modernist and showing his radical ambiguity. I found it rather enlightening, because formally we would take "A Madman's Diary" as a kind of social condemnation of the so-called feudal society and as a call for individual liberation. Even Professor Li Oufan says that there was an iron house in the world, and we need to break up the iron house to get a free breath of fresh air from a fresh world. I found that particularly interesting.

But as to Derek Walcott, I am not sure if the English language is his mother tongue. I hope he speaks another one or two languages, but I'm afraid that perhaps the English language is not his mother tongue. I would say that in his small country, it presents a difficult or challenging question what kind of role the British Empire played rather late in the nineteenth century, and in the first half of the twentieth century. There is an interesting parallel between Walcott and V. S. Naipaul. Both of them have received the Nobel Prize and Naipaul also had a father who was a kind of failed literary genius. Naipaul, in many places, talked about his father's frustrated ambitions to become a writer. But I'm afraid that Walcott and Naipaul's father both admire the English literary tradition. So this would make things more complicated, but sometimes I would say that the English legacy really has a liberatory force. As a colony, for instance, India was united by the English language. The idea of national independence—the idea itself, perhaps—was not native. The idea itself was imported, it came together with English literature, with the teaching of English literature. So India's nationalists all speak English. They found that English could overcome lots of local barriers, which would separate and possibly divide India, a big country, into many small parts. Thus their attitude towards English and the fact that it was embraced is a kind of legacy from the empire.

Dialogue Section C: World Literature: Significance, Challenge, and Future

Zhang Longxi

Before I begin, I would first like to thank Professor Fang Weigui for inviting me to this conference, thus giving me the great opportunity to have a dialogue with my friend David Damrosch. I think world literature is on the rise everywhere, and I am very happy to see that many people have come here on this occasion in order to talk about world literature. I begin with the famous painting by Bruegel of the Tower of Babel. I think it is significant, because without the Tower of Babel as a mythic story, there would be no world literature. Because we would all speak the same language, there would be no translation and no misunderstanding. Of course, that is pure imagination. But what we are living in, as George Steiner told us, is after Babel. We all speak different languages and have different cultures, histories, traditions. Therefore, it becomes important and also interesting that we can learn different languages and learn about different literatures. As David Damrosch has just beautifully illustrated, national and world literature become related in their tension and also in their dialectic relationship. You cannot have national literature without world literature, and world literature is certainly dependent on different national traditions, thus literary traditions. So I think that this painting, which I

Zhang Longxi (✉)
Department of Chinese and History,
City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
e-mail: ctlxzh@cityu.edu.hk

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8

have always liked—Bruegel is in fact one of my favorite painters—is symbolic of the situation of different languages. Of course, speaking of the Tower of Babel, we all know that in the Bible the story is that people wanted to build a tower so high that it became a step towards God's heaven. And thus God said, no, we can't let people come to this place, we have to confuse their languages. So God cursed the people building the Tower of Babel, and then people started talking in different languages and couldn't communicate. But when you don't understand each other, how can you build a tower?

Speaking of this story is very interesting, because in the seventeenth century in Europe, many philosophical thinkers (Umberto Eco has a beautiful book on that) were in search of the perfect language. Many European thinkers at the time were thinking that the way to get back to paradise or to the happy time before the fall of man was to find the Adamic language which was supposed to be created by God and was thus spoken by God to Adam, and which would make possible perfect communication, the way it existed before the fall of man. There were many different candidates that could be the Adamic language. Obviously ancient Hebrew would be one, ancient Greek would be another, ancient Egyptian would be a third. But then of course, all of these cannot be this coveted language, because they are all "European" languages; and we all know that these languages were cursed by God. So, actually, there is an English architect by the name of John Webb who wrote a very interesting book. The title says it all. In the seventeenth century, titles could be very long, but the long sentence expresses the things the book is all about. The title of this book is *An Historical Essay Endeavoring the Probability that the Language of the Empire of China is the Primitive Language.*[1] "Primitive" is not used in the modern sense of primitive, but in the sense of *premier*, as in French; that is to say, in the sense of *the first language*. Webb argues without knowing Chinese, of course, but based on the reports of Jesuit missionaries about China, that the Chinese language actually was the first language created by God. And his argument is based on two very important, irrefutable foundations, if you believe in the Bible. First, the Chinese language is very ancient. That's for sure. The second point is that the Bible never mentioned that the Chinese were participating in the building of the Tower of Babel. So, in other words, the Chinese were not cursed. Their language must be the Adamic language. Therefore, you can get back to heaven through learning Chinese. One day, I remember, at one occasion I was talking to a very famous professor in Oxford about John Webb. He

said, "Oh, that's rubbish." But l said, "That's very interesting rubbish." From my cultural point of view, it is very interesting, actually. Of course, linguistically, it doesn't make any sense at all. But the Tower of Babel story is, I think, the basis of different national traditions and literatures and therefore in a way, it is all about communication. Can we communicate across different languages and cultures? That is the challenge for communication, for translation, and also for world literature.

And the idea of world literature I think is very appropriate, particularly if we talk about this here, in Beijing. Because we know that world literature, or *Weltliteratur* as Wolfgang von Goethe proposed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is very important. When we discuss world literature, we inevitably come back to Goethe's idea, and it's important that Goethe talked to his young secretary Johann Eckermann about world literature at a time when he was reading a Chinese novel in translation, though we unfortunately don't know which one. But there exists a lot of research that claims it could be *Hao qiu zhuan*, which is not exactly a great Chinese novel from the Chinese point of view. But actually, Goethe knew this very well. When Eckermann asked him whether the novel he was talking about was the best Chinese novel, Goethe said, no, the Chinese have thousands of them; this is just one of them. He knew very well that this might not be the best Chinese novel. But nonetheless, he felt the novel got him to think about world literature—there was the sense that it was both very foreign and different from the European literature he was familiar with, but also understandable and readable. He could sympathize with the culture that became apparent in the novel. He could understand the people, their feelings and emotions. And he admired the Chinese novel in terms of moral propriety. Compared with European works, he saw that the Chinese really had a better morality; at least this was his argument. And by reading the Chinese novel, he had both a foreign and also a familiar reading experience, as he famously said precisely on January 31, 1827 when he was talking to Eckermann, as stated in the book Goethe's *Conversations with Eckermann*. In fact, I think Nietzsche once said, if you want to read just one book to learn something about German literature, read Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*. So that's a very important book. It mentions that Goethe said, "Poetry is the universal possession of mankind […] National literature is now rather an insignificant term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach." It is at the beginning of the nineteenth century when that proclamation was made by Goethe as a cosmopolitan thinker and great

writer. As a cosmopolitan, because at that time Germany was not a unified country. There were many different parties and there wasn't anything that united the Germans except the language. And Goethe, I must say, is very much ahead of his time. He was a cosmopolitan in the sense that he was not just interested in European literature. Of course, he considered himself as a consensual inheritor of the great Greco-Roman tradition. But at the same time, he was so very interested in world literature, such as we know it, that he wrote the *West-Eastern Divan* based on his love for the Persian poet Hafiz. He also loved the Indian poet Kalidasa and his famous play *Shakuntala*. So he was very interested in non-European literature as well as European literature. He really has a wider perspective than most of his contemporaries in the early nineteenth century.

It is obvious, of course, that comparative literature as a discipline was founded in the nineteenth century, and it was very much founded on the national bases rather than on the idea of *Weltliteratur*, as Goethe proposed. It is very important to remember this, because nowadays we say *comparative literature*. The English term of course is based on the French *littérature comparée* rather than the *Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* of the Germans. And this is important, because French literature has a great tradition and since very early on, there has been a long French tradition; French writers were doing a lot for the French language. They were debating or competing with Latin as the *lingua franca* and French became very important. So this is one thing that French literature was based on—the very strong national basis. Even though comparative literature, when studied as a discipline, reached beyond national traditions, I think that for much of the last 100 years, it has concentrated to a large extent on European literature alone. I mean comparative literature has been mostly Eurocentric. I don't mean that just pejoratively because it was concentrating on Europe and disregarding the rest of the world. I'll come to this later. There are reasons for this. But I also mean Eurocentric in a descriptive or positive sense, that the best scholarship in comparative literature is all about European literature. I can mention three important classic works. The first is *Mimesis*, for which the subtitle is *The Representation of Reality in Western Literature,* by Erich Auerbach. This is one of the important books everybody in comparative literature would know. Then there is another very important book by Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, which also very clearly discusses the European tradition, particularly from the medieval time to the modern. And a more recent book is Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, which proposes a

universal model of archetypal criticism or mythological criticism. But Northrop Frye only, or mainly, talks about Western literature. He mentioned Indian and Chinese literature in a few places, but didn't really talk about non-Western literature. So when I say comparative literature is very much Eurocentric, or focused on Europe, maybe Eurocentric is not the right term. What I meant is that it is really concentrating on European literature. And that is the case because the best scholarship, at least in earlier times, was really concentrating on European literature. There is a reason for this. Because from the very beginning, comparative literature emphasized linguistic proficiency. You must work with the original text. And at an early stage, there was the idea of the *Dekaglottismus*, 10 languages. But of course, they are all European languages: Latin, French, German and so on. So many of the comparatists were polyglots. They knew many languages, but most of them, or I would say all of them in earlier times, were European languages rather than non-European. And therefore in the 1970s, René Étiemble, the French comparatist, already complained about this. But you know, so far comparative literature is still very much dominated by the concentration on European literature. But now, here we have the age of world literature, beginning with the most influential book that my friend David wrote, *What Is World Literature?* I am sure many of you know this book. It discusses first the very early Gilgamesh, the Mesopotamian beginning of all written literature, and also includes the discussion of Egyptian literature and many others. So this is really a new time. I think it's the right time to come back to world literature as Goethe first mentioned it. In David's book, it began with Goethe about world literature; that is, not just European literature, but the literature of the world, including non-European traditions.

I want to read three passages from this book that are very important, to help us conceptualize what world literature means. This is from David's book: "I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language (Virgil was long read in Latin in Europe)." This is important because to be a work of world literature, it has to be a work that circulates beyond its national boundaries, it has to be in a *lingua franca*, and that is exactly what Virgil's was. His *Aeneid* was written in Latin, and Latin for a very long time—in Europe from medieval to early modern times, even in the nineteenth century—was a common language for all educated people and therefore the *lingua franca* in Europe. And therefore, this language becomes important. For us today, I may say that we are all speaking

English. I am speaking in English now, not in Chinese. On many occasions, when we have international conferences, we have international publications, we use English; English today is the *lingua franca*, no longer Latin, and no longer even French, which was formerly a much more widely used language as a *lingua franca*. In one of Tolstoy's novels, for example, all conversations between noblemen were in French, but that is the time when the upper class would speak French in Russia. Today I must say that English is the *lingua franca*. And therefore, it is important. And that has many implications for, we can say, the power relationship between different languages. For example, take the Nobel Prize in Literature. Many people complain that you have to be translated into English or a major European language in order to get the Nobel Prize, which is true, because the Nobel Prize is awarded by a group of Swedish scholars. They can only read so many languages and apparently, most of them read European languages. Of course, Swedish is not necessarily required because it is such a minor language. If you feel that what you write has to be in Swedish, the audience is very limited. But indeed, a major language is important. Think even of some of the earlier Scandinavian writers. For example, Strindberg was Swedish, but he became known internationally in French translation. Ibsen was a Norwegian playwright who became known not in his Norwegian original, but in German translation. So even in earlier times, even for smaller European traditions or what we call minor languages, it is true that they have to be translated into a major European language before these authors could get the Nobel Prize. Therefore, translation is an important matter.

Now the second paragraph I want to read is this: "World literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike." This, I think, is David's very general movement in defending world literature. World literature is a mode of reading, a mode of circulation, and that applies to both established classics and new discoveries. My understanding is that new discoveries refers to the discovery of important works of non-European languages, just as David presented a little earlier today the Vietnamese, the Latin American and even the Chinese. We Chinese think we have a long history, we have a great literary canon. Indeed, our history dates back to times so much earlier than most European literature, than Goethe when he was talking about world literature. When Eckermann asked him about this Chinese novel, he said the

Chinese had thousands of them and they already had them when our forefathers were still wandering in the forests. So he knew very well that Chinese has a tradition that goes back a very long time indeed. We have a long history, we have great works in history, we always think of the Han Dynasty, Tang Dynasty or Song Dynasty as the most important periods of Chinese literary history, and those periods of history were vibrant much earlier than many of the European traditions. When you read the history of English literature, the first work is *Beowulf* far back in the tenth century, which has nothing to do with England but is all about the Danes from Scandinavia. That is already the time of the Song Dynasty, so forget about Tang, forget about Han, forget about pre-Qin literatures and all that. But Chinese literature is not exactly world literature as such, because most of its important works are not widely known beyond China. So here you can see the imbalance of cultural capital power, because I would say that most Chinese students—college students who major in literature—would know the names of Shakespeare, Dostoevsky and many other great names in European culture. But you can't say the same about American or European students. Unless they are sinology majors, they would know nothing about Tao Yuanming, Su Dongpo and all these great names. So you can see this is an important imbalance. And I think world literature offers a really wonderful opportunity for us today to introduce our canonic works to the world. Let people appreciate and understand the works we consider important; it is not nationalism—it has nothing to do with that. It is an important movement so that scholars of different traditions can introduce their works to a much wider international readership.

The last paragraph I would like to read is this: "World literature has often been seen in one or more of three ways: as an established body of classics, as an evolving canon of masterpieces, or as multiple windows on the world." I think it is also important to understand which canonic works of literature would be part of world literature. First of all is the established body of classics. *Classics* of course refers to all classics, not just European classics but also Chinese, Indian, Persian, Arabic and African classics, all those different traditions. They all have their own classics, but with the exception of the major European classics, we don't really know much about them. And therefore, I think it is a wonderful opportunity for different national traditions to be more widely known beyond their culture of origin. "Canons of masterpieces" is indeed the same idea, or "windows on the world," because we all know that to learn languages and read literatures is really the best way to understand different cultures and different

traditions. The world is not just economics, technology and weaponry. The world is more about human beings and prompts us to look for the best way to understand the psychology, the customs and the traditions of different peoples. The best way, in this regard, is to try to understand their literature and arts. That is the importance of humanity and the humanities. I would argue that the humanities are very important, not just for upper-class cultural elites, but in order to understand different cultures and to have a better world to live in.

Of course, world literature also faces many challenges, and among the works produced in this regard, one of the better ones is the book by Emily Apter that she calls *Against World Literature*. She said: "A primary argument here is that many recent efforts to revive World Literature rely on a translatability assumption. As a result, incommensurability and what has been called the Untranslatable are insufficiently built into the literary heuristic." Here of course we have this very important concept of incommensurability and untranslatability. Incommensurability comes from the famous book by Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which was one of the most influential books in the 1970s and 1980s. In that book, Thomas Kuhn was arguing that science progresses by revolutions. When revolutions happen, everything changes. Scientists work under a certain paradigm; that is, a general framework within which you make your scientific discoveries and experiments. And when you have a new discovery of elementary importance, this makes it necessary that a new paradigm comes in, the old paradigm will be replaced by the new, and a completely different set of concepts and principles will be in operation. And that is what he called a scientific revolution. He argues that due to scientific revolutions, scientists working under different scientific paradigms are like people living in different worlds, so to speak; they cannot understand each other. His major example was the conflict between the geocentric Ptolemaics and the heliocentric Copernicans. We know the so-called Copernican revolution that happened when it was discovered that the sun rather than the earth is the center around which all the planets revolve. Kuhn argues that the two paradigms are so different that among scientists, the Copernicans and Ptolemaics couldn't talk to each other, they couldn't understand each other, because the concepts they used have totally different meanings, which is of course an exaggeration. When you have a debate, when you have a controversy, people do understand each other. The Ptolemaics understood very well that the Copernicans had proposed a model of the universe which was challenging the old model. They

had a debate. Just imagine that you are arguing with somebody and you don't understand everything that the other side is saying: how can you argue? Also, the concept of incommensurability—that is to say, that there is nothing in common and you cannot communicate with each other—became unfortunately very influential, not so much in science or the history of science as Thomas Kuhn's original purpose was, but in the social sciences and the humanities. Actually, there are many critiques of Kuhn. So finally, I think after his death, there was another book by him that was published; it is called *The Road since the Structure*. That refers to the road taken by him since *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, his original book. And in the second book he retreated from his earlier position by saying that incommensurability does not really mean that they don't understand each other, but that there are certain concepts in science that are untranslatable in a sense and they mean totally different things. Therefore the terms cannot be translated. And that intervention became also very important and influential. I think the two terms here, incommensurability and untranslatability, are very much employed by those continuing Kuhn's argument. And I think that argument has been refuted and criticized by many. Let us remember here why I began with Bruegel's painting of the Tower of Babel. The whole point of translation, of communication, is to find a way to understand each other precisely, even when we have different languages and traditions and literatures. World literature is also an effort of trying to come to understand different literatures and cultures beyond whatever linguistic and cultural differences there are. So, in a way, I would say that Apter's argument comes from a different position when she insists on untranslatability.

Okay, let us look at the second paragraph: "With translation assumed to be a good thing *en soi* – under the assumption that it is a critical praxis enabling communication across languages, cultures, time periods and disciplines – the right to the Untranslatable was blindsided." So in a way she was arguing against translation studies, because of the idea of translation, and she says: "With translation assumed to be a good thing *en soi*." That is, we think translation is a good thing in itself, but actually when you say this, you have already ignored or blindsided the very idea of the untranslatable. What is untranslatable exactly? Let us read the third paragraph: "Glossolalia is not wide of the mark of Wittgenstein's nonsense with its attendant lexicon of *das Unsagbare* (the Unsayable), *das Unverständlich* (the Un-understandable) and *das Unaussprechliche* (the Inexpressible) introduced in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*." Basically, Wittgenstein's

Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus is a very influential philosophical book, especially in Anglo-American analytic philosophy. Proficiency with regard to what Apter called nonsense—the unsayable, the ununderstandable, the inexpressible—is nonsense. So basically, she is arguing that in philosophy as well as in philology, there is the idea that something is not possible to translate or not possible even to say, to express. The untranslatable can be understood on two levels. On the linguistic level, anybody who learns a foreign language knows that sometimes you cannot have a word as an equivalent. There are many words in European languages we don't have in Chinese, and sometimes we have Chinese words that we don't have equivalents for in European languages. But there are many different ways of solving the problem, one of which is to translate the notion. When you don't have a word, just say that word. For example, "shafa" in Chinese. We all know we are sitting in a sort of *shafa* style, that's as if on a sofa. In Chinese tradition we don't have a sofa, but we call it "shafa," which is close to "sofa." And "doufu" is a Chinese product that you don't find in European cuisine, and now the English dictionary already has tofu as a word. So everybody knows what tofu is. You can buy it in the supermarket in America. It is not a concept that is mysterious, inexpressible, ineffable, the essence of God or something. But that is exactly what Apter is referring to, because she is referring to Wittgenstein as a philosophical example and to mysticism as a religious example. Mysticism would be very interesting. I dealt with it before in my book *The Tao and the Logos*. Mystics, philosophers and poets all say, language is not sufficient to express what they want to say. And when they complain that they cannot express something, they use more words than other people, not less.

There is a beautiful passage by the German scholar Karl Vossler, who describes the mystic movement of trying to find the essence of God. Because you cannot find the essence of God in words, he describes how mystics use words as if dancing around God, trying to somehow hit the mark. This is very much a description of mystic writings. In China we are familiar with this because of Laozi's *Dao de jing*—just take the first line, "The dao that can be spoken of, is not the constant dao." Laozi lived in the state of Zhou for a very long time. When the state of Zhou was declining, he left. So when he went to the pass, the pass keeper said to him, "Now you are going to leave us. Why not write a book with your philosophy? Otherwise we couldn't understand it." And Laozi ironically said that "[i]t's impossible to write it because whatever is Dao cannot be expressed in words." And therefore, there is the first line that states: "The

Dao that can be spoken of is not the constant Dao (道可道, 非常道). The name that can be named is not the constant name (名可名, 非常名)." So basically that's about the notion of *dao* that cannot be expressed in language; but nonetheless he wrote those 5000 words of the *Dao de jing*. And of course, Zhuangzi is even more radical. Zhuangzi's is one of the most beautiful books in Chinese, actually. I don't think anybody can be a good writer in China without reading Zhuangzi. If you are a Chinese writer, you'd better read Zhuangzi, otherwise you cannot be very good. Zhuangzi is even more radical; he said, "Dao cannot be named, whatever is named is not Dao (道不可名), Dao cannot be seen, whatever is seen is not Dao (道不可见)." He also said, "To debate is not as good as to keep silent (辩不如默)." So when you debate with people, it is better to keep your mouth shut. It is a better, more effective way. But of course, Zhuangzi is the one who used all kinds of metaphors, parables, allegories, beautiful stories to tell whatever he believes cannot be told. So that's the irony, what I call the "ironic pattern." Whoever tries to escape from language uses more language to express whatever he thinks is beyond language. That is the irony and the beauty of mystic writing. This is true not just of Zhuangzi. You can think of Buddhist mystics, you can think of Meister Eckhart in medieval Europe, it is all the same. So whatever is called the silent or ineffable is a mistaken notion that again is a desire, and is in fact an almost Utopian desire to have the essence without saying anything. That's not just Zhuangzi or Daoist philosophers, even Confucians share in it. He, Confucius, believes language has a function. I don't know what happened to Confucius. One day he said: "I'm not going to talk." And his students panicked and said, "If you don't talk, how can we youngsters pass on your teachings?" And he pointed to the heaven and said, "Does heaven ever talk? You see the four seasons run their course, hundreds of things grow up. Does heaven ever speak?" So even in Confucianism there is a kind of mystic moment of the desire for pure and complete communication without language, without the whole problem in philosophy, in religion.

Therefore I find Emily Apter's arguments nothing new. Basically it's something that we have seen since certain plays and tales in the West evoked it, and since Laozi, Zhuangzi, did so in China; we have seen it for thousands of years. And then the whole point is still that yes, we are living in a world that is after Babel. We do have different languages and different literatures and different traditions or histories. Everything is different. We look different, certainly. But the question is, beyond all the differences,

how can we understand each other? How can we overcome God's curse directed at the Tower of Babel, in order to find a way to communicate? This is very urgent. It is not just something that has merely an aesthetic function. It has real relevance for the world. Look at our world. There are so many conflicts. There are so many wars, even, and bloody conflicts. That is due to a lack of communication, I think. I am sure if you read more literature, read more poems just like the beautiful poems David read, you are less likely to kill somebody else. So there is a real humanistic influence on people. Therefore, for me at least, to study literature is never just to enjoy the beauty of language. Of course, I do. I mean that the aesthetic experience is at the core, and thus central to literary criticism, but beyond that communication is important. It really has relevance in our world today.

Now I must say that I am very reverent of many different traditions and I will just show some of them. Here you have two pictures on the left side. It is the manuscript of Hafiz's poems, a Persian poet. As I said, Goethe was very interested in Hafiz. And on the other side is Sakuntala, a famous Indian play. These are famous works, that's why I show the pictures. But I am sure that there are many other works from, say, Persia or India that I don't even know the names of, because nobody has told me. And it's very important for people who specialize for example in Persian literature, in Indian literatures, in Sanskrit, in Hindi and all those different languages, to introduce those works so that we know them. It's not just non-Western works, but even about Europe we need to know more. These here are not exactly all Europeans, actually. That one, the old man with the beard, is Omar Khayyam. He's a Persian poet who was famously translated by Fitzgerald and that is considered an important work now. But the others are European. In the upper left corner is Mickiewicz, a famous Polish poet. And on the right, on top of Omar Khayyam, is José Martí, a Cuban poet. And down here is Ivo Andric, a famous Serbian writer. He got his Nobel Prize for the beautiful novel *The Bridge on the Drina*. In the middle, the funny guy is *The Good Soldier Schweik*. It is a very interesting Czech work. I remember that when I was young we read that in a Chinese translation. So it is known in China, although perhaps not in the West. In the 1950s and 1960s, we translated many works from fellow Communist countries, so we knew about these. Thus my point is that we must not just focus on the major European traditions. We know something about English literature, French literature, Italian, German, maybe nineteenth-century Russian authors—not all, but the major works. We know some of the names, but it is necessary to recall less-studied minor languages or

traditions that we do not know much about. It is not only necessary for non-European traditions to introduce their works, but also for minor traditions in Europe that are called minor literatures to have this opportunity to introduce their canonic works, the best works in their tradition as a part of world literature.

And here you have this beautiful calligraphy of Chinese poetry. I don't have to read it all. In China, as I said earlier, we have a long tradition, we have many great poets and works. You may have heard of Tang poetry, but how many poems do you know? I mean outside China. Except for a small number of sinologists, most European readers would have no idea who these poets are and what the works are. So, again, it's very important. It is a good opportunity for us to introduce the great poets and writers we have to the world.

Here is Fan Kuan's *Xishanxinglütu*, by a famous Song dynasty painter—a wonderful painting, the original of which is in Taipei. On the other side I have put a landscape painting by Rembrandt, a seventeenth-century Dutch painter. My idea is to say that if you look at those paintings, they are very different in style, but there are similarities—you can see the idea of nature and the humanized concept of nature. Landscape painting is never a photograph. We can have a kind of prejudice with respect to what we see with our eyes. It is always humanist, always has a subject, has a point of view, and the way a painter looks at the landscape, and the landscape that is chosen, can tell us a lot. Not just about beautiful trees and mountains and so on, but there is something that is deeply human in the paintings. This of course is not only true of landscape paintings. You can think of seventeenth-century still-lifes by Dutch painters. They always have something, some kind of message, and sometimes they are very deep in critically revealing some people's bad ways. In a sense you have to read the painting, as well; when you look at the painting, you just look at the form, the color, but you also have to understand the internal ideas and concepts. And this is what I think we can do in the age of world literature. This is why we as scholars, as critics, as students of literature, can introduce the best of what we understand, and we can introduce that not just for our own fellow citizens, but really for the citizens of the world. We are all citizens of the world and world literature is a way to promote, I think, a better world, a more peaceful, harmonious world that we can live in.

Reference

1. Other editions exist with slightly different titles; thus: John Webb, *An Historical Essay, Endeavoring A Probability That the Language of the Empire of China Is the Primitive Language*. London, Printed for Nath. Brook, at the Angel in Gresham College, 1669; and: John Webb, The Antiquity of China, Or, An Historical Essay, Endeavouring A Probability That the Language of the Empire of China Is the Primitive Language Spoken Through the Whole World Before the Confusion of Babel: Wherein the Customs and Manners of the Chineans Are Presented, And Ancient and Modern Authors Consulted; With A Large Map of the Country. London: Printed for Obadiah Blagrave, at the Bear in St. Paul's church-yard, near the little north door, 1678.

Dialogue Section D: Who Decides the "United Nations of Great Books": Inspired by Prof. Zhang's Speech

Martin Kern

Thank you very much for having me here. I'm coming to you not as a specialist in comparative or world literature, but as someone who works on Chinese antiquity. We are in China, so this is appropriate. Professor Fang and I met last year for the first time at a conference at Peking University, which is my university here in Beijing where I studied. We were talking about translation at that time and I think that is why he then invited me here.

I also feel deeply honored to be able to comment on Professor Zhang's rich paper this morning. I must say I came here with a feeling of both excitement and considerable terror, because I knew that Professor Zhang would be talking for about 40 minutes, while what I had been given beforehand was just a two-page summary. So I went by that summary when I wrote my comment—and yet now, conveniently, he completely departed from that summary! But in the end he came back to what I think is the most interesting and exciting part of that summary, and that is what I want to focus on, as I now improvise my comments.

Of course I agree with Professor Zhang's idea that he formulated at the very end, where he said we should bring the best things from our own literary traditions into world literature. We should bring our classics. We should bring our canonical texts. This is the stuff that matters. Because we

M. Kern (✉)
Department of East Asian Studies, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, USA
e-mail: mkern@princeton.edu

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8

cannot just bring everything. And of course, Professor Damrosch has written on this in great detail in his book *What Is World Literature?* The idea is that one way of looking at world literature is to look at the classics. Now, this leads to some sort of United Nations of Great Books, and I kind of agree with that, but I have to disagree with a few things, so that we can have a discussion. In that spirit, I will come up with a few points.

I am happy that Professor Zhang started with Goethe, as we always do. I studied German literature in my home country, which is Germany, and I am a great fan of Goethe. Yet although that passage on world literature that we have been talking about this morning is always involved at the beginnings of our ruminations on world literature, I find it a very troubling passage. There is a lot I find difficult to understand in Goethe's passage. I will come back to that in my talk tomorrow, so let me not dwell on this now.

In my own field, ancient China, what I really believe is that we cannot do our best work by simply taking the ancient Chinese texts on their own terms. We have to put them into a comparative perspective. We have to confront them with world literature, precisely in order to find ways to better imagine them in their own world of antiquity.

What I will say—pointing to something that happens a lot in my field—is that we assimilate the ancient classics to our own needs; we always do that. This has been done for 2000 years in the ever-evolving Chinese tradition, and of course most powerfully in the early twentieth century by people like Hu Shi, about whom we heard this morning. Hu Shi is really, to some extent, a product of American education, and the reading of the ancient Chinese classics that we have today is really the May Fourth reading. It is the reading of May Fourth nationalism and a search for cultural origins, for a new Chinese nation. In this, it is very similar to Herder and the Brothers Grimm in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who looked for the origins of Germany: not just for German literature, but for the origins of the German language, in the tongue of German folk songs.

This is exactly how modern Chinese readers read the *Shijing*, especially the *Guofeng*. And I think we have to liberate ourselves from these modern readings in order to rediscover classical texts, the classics that then matter again as parts of world literature. We cannot just take the most recent reading of the classics and say that's what it is and that's how we run with it. As the British novelist L. P. Hartley begins his 1953 book *The Go-Between*, "the past is a foreign country. They do things differently there." This is wonderfully captured in the ancient *Shijing*, which is the

literary classic of China. And in order to understand the *Shijing* in its own world, we need to forget almost everything that modern scholars have said about it. For example, nobody in early China—and by early China, I mean before the empire—nobody ever asks where that text comes from. Nobody ever asks what the original meaning is. Nobody ever asks who wrote these songs. These are all our own, modern questions. Everyone before the empire, and that includes Confucius, is concerned with what you can do with it, how you can appropriately apply it, and how you create a new cultural communion with your audience. And I think this is not only how the *Shijing* worked in early China before it was put in the service of the imperial state and the imperial scholars; it is precisely how world literature works. You know, of course, to some extent, that there is some relevance in questions like where does it come from, who wrote it and what does that person want to do with it. But the moment it enters into different communities, as Professor Damrosch has spread out very eloquently in his book, it really changes in its meaning, and its original authorship begins to matter less, and to matter in different ways.

So, when Professor Zhang at the end of his talk just said that we really have to bring our best texts to the United Nations of World Literature, I completely agree. We cannot have world literature as a random pile of everything that has been written. Obviously, that is not possible, plus all the oral literature of the world which usually gets short shrift here. (May I remind you that the *Shijing*, in my view, is much more an oral text than a written text.) We need some ways to select and to introduce the best of our own traditions to the world. That seems like a good point to start with.

Now, it is also true and totally obvious that at the very moment when we begin to talk about world literature, we have to talk about translation, as Professor Zhang does, and we always come back to Jerome and basically ask the same questions that he was asking: should we translate meaning or should we translate words? At the same time, we have to think of Schleiermacher's essential question: should we take the text to the reader or the reader to the text? Of course, we need translation and we must take it seriously; simply because there are no other options after Babel. There can only be world literature because it requires translation. But translation does not mean just from one contemporary language into another contemporary language. Translation also means from the past to the present. Absolutely for me: I firmly believe it does not matter in which language you read the *Shijing*, in modern Chinese

or in anything else. You are translating it, because the past is a foreign country. Of course, we have all the problems with translation, as ever. And I agree with Professor Zhang's critique about trying to do what cannot be done and insist on doing it, just as Confucius says, as you know. I hope that in the minds of our Chinese audience here, the right passage from the *Lunyu* now lights up. Isn't he the man who knows it cannot be done and who insists on doing it?

But if we now think about how we bring our best works to the world—and I like this model that came to my mind when I heard Professor Zhang's comments that we send our own delegates to the United Nations of Great Books—of course one problem is, literature is not a democracy, and that is probably a good thing. But then we have to ask how we organize this United Nations of Great Books. Which country—or rather, which language—gets to send how many delegates? Based on what? Size of the country? Size of the population? Geostrategic power of the different nations? Which countries or communities are even entitled to have their own delegates? I think that is a question that resonates in China very well.

Who determines what the canonical works are? What the classics are? Who controls the selection? And when do we do that, relative to the time of these works? How do we evaluate the literature of our own time that is by definition not yet canonical, but that must be part of world literature, too? So, if we just go for the Great Books, we are in some way reproducing the same problem of canonicity and hegemony that world literature has been struggling with since Goethe, except that we are now repeating it within our own communities: what gets in and what does not?

Professor Damrosch has long argued for world literature as the body of texts that gains in translation. That is a very important concept, because it reverses the selection process: it is the other side that gets to decide what works for them. It is not that I get to decide what works as canonical in my own culture, which I can then bring into the world. In other words, we would have to accept to see ourselves *represented*; our own cultures, "siwen" as Confucius says—"this culture" of ours. We have to accept to see this culture represented in this United Nations of Great Books by delegates we may not really like or acknowledge, maybe. So it is the Russians who get to decide whom the Americans can send, it is the Indians who decide whom the Chinese can send, and so on. That seems rather difficult to accept, of course. But if you think about it, that is exactly how world literature works. It is the translators who make the decisions how to translate, and they are coming from the target language, they are not coming

from the source language. So they have to figure out how our things would work in their language. How a classic survives and circulates in the world is determined by the translation, not by the original text. We do not control how our own canons enter world literature, and what they are doing there, and what meanings they attain there.

The real problem, then, is still with translation. One thing translation easily does with the text is that it levels it, it invariably has to operate at some level of superficiality, and it may trivialize a great text. In a way, whatever is canonical is also by definition never fully translatable, precisely because it is so rich in its own context; or that is exactly what we hope it to be.

But then there is also canonization, the agreement on what the great classics are. The canonical work, in order to appeal to all of us and to be representative, has to be leveled. Over the time of a long cultural tradition, it must agree to things that are not its own; namely, the cultural contexts and demands of later readers, be they historical or ideological. Therefore, notice how often—or even always?—the canon is tied up with the purposes of the nation, with the project of nation-building. For this reason alone, the canon has no passport, or at least it has no visa.

Here I come to the paradox of tradition: we always treat those works as canonical and representative of their time, or of a genre, or of an idea, that in their own contexts were never representative but different.

In fact, more often than not, the very definition of the best works of literature is that they were out of sync with their own time. That is true almost all the time. They were invariably disruptions of the pleasant status quo, they went beyond what everyone else was doing. If you want to know what is great about Du Fu, just read the stuff that other people wrote at his time and then you will see why Du Fu is great: because he is different. He is not representative. If you think Du Fu is representative of the *shengtang* period, the glorious time of the *Tang*, he is not. Contemporary anthologies have not a single poem by Du Fu in them. That is what makes the classics great in the beginning: they were precisely not assimilated to their own culture but took that culture to a new place—and again, that is a beautiful parallel to how world literature works. You have to take it to a new place. Or think of Tao Qian. How long did it take for Tao Qian to become canonical? We heard about Tao Qian a lot this morning. How long did it take? About 700 years! That is quite a stretch. Think of Goethe, the one person of that time in Germany, or in the world of the German language, who was extraordinarily successful in his own time and could

actually live from selling his books. That was very rare at that time, but Goethe could do it. He was very successful but then, when he got old and when he wrote the most fascinating stuff he ever wrote, his late poetry, he was completely unacceptable to his own time and it took 150 years before scholars, German scholars of Goethe, got over the disruptions that Goethe's late poetry introduced into German literature. You have scholars in the 1950s throwing up their hands and saying: did he lose his sense of grammar? Was Goethe just struck by senility? Of course not. If you read his late poetry, it is the best thing he ever wrote. There are quite a few people who agree with that, but only today.

So this is the potential of world literature, I think, of the classics of world literature, because these texts are disruptive in their own time, they are never fully the texts of their own culture. Therefore they may offer possibilities to resonate elsewhere, and perhaps even more so than in their own culture. So we must give these great texts the space, their own space, that precisely removes them from the demands of their own culture on them, as to being canonical and representative. We must liberate them from that. We must allow for their differences vis-à-vis their own culture, for their uniqueness, for their being non-representative or, as Adorno would say, for their being non-identical. We must allow for this radical alterity of literature in its own context, or at least its radical ambiguity, the word that came up this morning, that always resists the leveling that is brought about by both canonization and translation.

I think that is what Italo Calvino meant when he said a classic is a text that has never stopped saying what it has to say. Such a beautiful line makes me cry when I read it in this beautiful essay "Why I Read the Classics." Calvino says at the end that the only good reason I can tell you why you should read the classics is that it's better to read the classics than not to read them. That is actually more profound than it seems. There is something often immanent that transcends the national in our own best texts. They are just international from the beginning. They are disruptive. They transcend their own time and culture. And while it's good to read them, that reading cannot be easy or simple.

But how can this literature then be canonical without becoming assimilated, domesticated and leveled flat? How can this literature remain itself instead of becoming appropriated by the national discourse surrounding it, and for the purpose of nation-building that is surrounding it? In other words, if we send the great classics as our representatives to the United Nations of World Literature, do we have to diminish them first and trans-

form them in order to serve our own national purposes, not only through translation, but through canonization in the first place?

And then what do we do with our own works, of our own time, that are not yet canonical? Is world literature by definition a museum corpus of literature? Only the corpus of dead bodies? Dead for how long? How dead do they have to be in order to be resurrected as world literature? Think of Tao Qian and Du Fu again: how long they had been dead before they could come to life again in their own culture. So, what are the Great Books? And to which extent do they need to be leveled and trivialized in order to work as canonical works?

If we accept all of that, which seems kind of hard, we have to make allowances for our texts, as we bring our best classics to the world. We have to allow that they will be radically reinterpreted and rewritten in the minds of readers. So are Americans ready to have their classics reinterpreted by Chinese readers, and vice versa? Of course, but it's never painless. It can't be painless. If it can be painless, then it's not working. World literature must hurt, it must create pain when being translated back into its national contexts. When you move it to the broader world of literature to see what it does there and then take it back from there, that must hurt. If there is no tension there, if there is no disagreement in that moving out and back, I think that is the sure sign that something didn't work, and something didn't get reinvented as world literature. So we are not in some cozy assembly in the company of Great Books but rather, we have to discover and then bear the disturbing potential of the classics, both at home and in the world. In this sense, a canon of world literature may well be a canon that undermines the national canon it comes from. Or, put the other way around, the national canon cannot survive in its *national* meaning as part of the world literature canon. Instead, the world literature canon has to speak back to the national canon, and has to disrupt and destroy its national meaning. And in this, I think world literature may actually connect back to the texts that were great before they became part of the national canon. Maybe you have to, first of all, find your best classics, find your canonical works, and let go of what your own culture needs from them and on what grounds it makes them canonical, in order to have them really work as world literature. Because national literature for national purpose doesn't really have a passport: the passport gets lost in the nationalism of the texts.

Dialogue Section E: Response

David Damrosch and Zhang Longxi

These are both such rich responses and at the same time they are equally interesting, I think. I will just comment on a few things. Zhang Longxi was talking about the Tower of Babel story, and thus the question of the untranslatable. As I read the Tower of Babel story in the Bible, it is itself a document of a minor language's resistance to the hegemonic culture of Babylon. The very name "Babel" is a fake etymology: they say it was called Babel (Babylon) from the Hebrew verb *balal*, which means "to confuse" their language. Now any speaker in the region would know that "Bab-el" means "the gate of God"; this would seem obvious. "Bab" means gate or door in Arabic to this day, while "EL" means God, so it is obvious what it means: the name refers to the temple or ziggurat of Marduk, the patron god of Babylon. By pretending that "Babel" means "confuse," the biblical writer satirically pretends that "Babel" derives from a mistake in writing the consonants (Hebrew doesn't write vowels): BBL in place of BLL. The point of this pretended

D. Damrosch
Department of Comparative Literature, Harvard University,
Cambridge, MA, USA
e-mail: ddamrosc@fas.harvard.edu

Zhang Longxi (✉)
Department of Chinese and History,
City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
e-mail: ctlxzh@cityu.edu.hk

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8

etymology is to say, this is why we are untranslatable, we get to have our own Hebrew language and don't have to write that Akkadian cuneiform that our Babylonian overlords use. So this very dream of the universal languages in fact expresses a resistance to the universal language of Babylon.

On the point of the classic as resistance or as undermining national purposes, let me say that a classic can also undermine imperial purposes as well. I think of a wonderful recent memoir written by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, called *In the House of the Interpreter*. There he describes growing up in colonial Kenya, where he and his classmates were radicalized by acting in Shakespearean history plays. Ngugi says: "We learned that a dynasty can be deposed." They learned a message from Shakespeare that was precisely the opposite of what their imperial education was supposed to teach them.

So absolutely I think it is true that what makes a work great is that it describes its culture, even as it may change the culture as well. The case of Mozart has come up, and I recall that his close friend and teacher Haydn was baffled by the opening of Mozart's "dissonant" string quartet, and he said, "Well if Mozart wrote this, he must have had a reason." Today we may think that Mozart's music was very pretty and accessible, but we can recover the radicalized innovations that even Haydn couldn't understand.

We do need to understand and appreciate that different cultures have values in their own literature, but on the other hand we are not simply archivists; we need to bring in the works that speak to us today. And I think we actually need counter-canonical works as well as major canonical works. This is so not only for contemporary literature, but for earlier periods as well. Having worked, for instance, on the medieval mystic Mechthild von Magdeburg, who I think is a fascinating writer, I won't say she is on the level of Dante, although she appears in Dante's *Commedia*, but she becomes interesting for her extraordinary poetic voice and her complex relation to the male hierarchies around her. Thus we can understand that different works have their different purposes and can be read accordingly.

I think these responses give an extraordinarily rich understanding, especially in the emphasis on the intellectual re-reading of the classics and the value of understanding the traditions they come from and that they also play against.

Because time is running out, I will just reply to one thing, which concerns world literature as outlined in my abstract of two pages. I forgot to say that the literary crisis is not about translation of the great texts. Let me repeat that we may very well take Tao Qian as an example. I mean it was not until

the Song Dynasty that Su Shi's reading made him one of the greatest Chinese poets and he was never mentioned by his contemporaries. *Wen Xin Diao Long* did not even mention his name and *Shi Pin* put him in the middle rank, not among the highly ranked. These are two important critical works. He was not appreciated by Yan Yanzhi, his contemporary; when he died, he was pristine, but what Yan Yanzhi mentioned was his moral culture: Bu Wei Wu Dou Mi Zhe Yao, *he was not bending himself for the little official salary at that time*. Yan did not mention his writings. Apparently, his writing style was alien to most of his contemporaries. He was not appreciated as a great poet until 500 years later, so that was a long wait. Thus what I think is important is not just to translate Tao Qian, but to talk really precisely about this kind of challenge and difference of his time, and how his work challenged contemporary norms, and how he became one of the great poets and related to the later ones, particularly as soon the Chinese sensed that this kind of playing with simple, suggestive language is much more powerful than very strong, individual words or expressions. This is the kind of work that needs to be done much more than translating, but this is also why we have to persuade readers who do not have the historical background to understand why this is a great work and why we should read it. I mean, as you said, as we have all agreed, we have so little time to read everything, we have to read the best, and then we have to persuade readers who do not know these works why this is the best, what it can mean to us, and that we should be discussing such works. That is part of the important work that we do by studying world literature.

Index[1]

[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.

W. Fang (ed.), *Tensions in World Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0635-8

I